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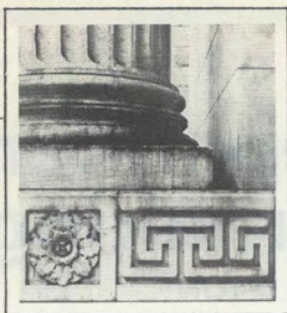
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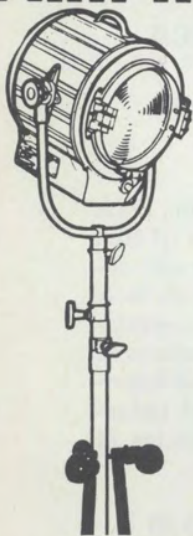
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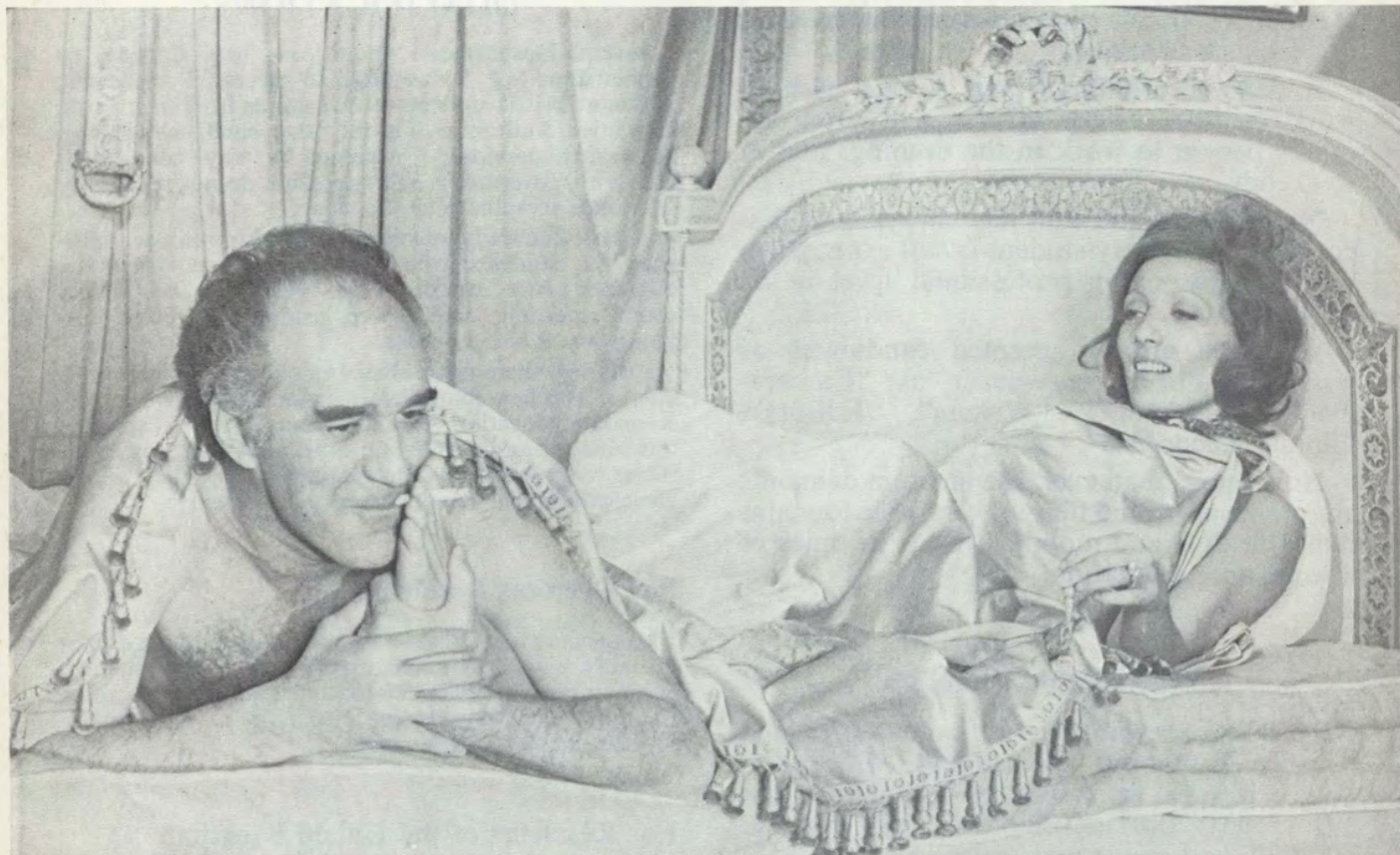
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movies. Directors represented include *Renoir*, *Bresson* and *Becker*. Finally there are two larger general seasons. *Hollywood on Hollywood*—an examination of the movie town, through its own image. And *The Stunt Stars*, a view of films—long past and more recent—featuring particularly memorable stunting feats and spectacular effects. Altogether some 150 features, plus a number of shorts and extracts, will be screened during this programme period. Seasons during late May, June and July will include *The Detective in Film*, *New Bulgarian Films*, *Satyajit Ray*, *German Classics*, *Tribute to the Museum of Modern Art* and a *Cuban Week*.

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Editor: Penelope Houston  
Associate: David Wilson  
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# SIGHT AND SOUND

SPRING 1974

Volume 43 No. 2

## INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY

Articles	<b>Ten Points about the Crisis in the British Film Industry</b>	66
	David Gordon	
	<b>Zardoz and John Boorman</b>	73
	Philip Strick	
	<b>Gatsby</b>	78
	Penelope Houston	
	<b>Tomorrow the World: Some Reflections on the un-Englishness of English Films</b>	80
	John Russell Taylor	
	<b>Images of Britain</b>	84
	David Wilson	
	<b>Goofy and Babbitt</b>	94
	Art Babbitt, Richard Williams	
	<b>The Illustrated Man: an interview with Ray Bradbury</b>	96
Thomas R. Atkins		
<b>From Murnau to Munich: New German Cinema</b>	101	
David L. Overbey		
<b>Leacock at M.I.T.: an interview with Richard Leacock</b>	104	
Louis Marcorelles		
<b>Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom: Film Form, Style and Aesthetics</b>	108	
Barry Salt		
<b>Witnesses of War</b>	110	
Penelope Houston		
<b>Cops</b>	113	
Philip French		
Features	<b>In the Picture</b>	88
	<b>Resnais' Stavisky</b>	92
	<b>Correspondence</b>	124
	<b>Film Guide</b>	126
Reviews	<b>American Graffiti</b>	116
	Jan Dawson	
	<b>The Three Musketeers</b>	116
	David L. Overbey	
	<b>The Day of the Dolphin</b>	117
	Richard Combs	
	<b>Company Limited</b>	118
Penelope Houston		
<b>Nada</b>	119	
Tom Milne		
<b>Payday</b>	120	
Tony Rayns		
<b>The Exorcist</b>	120	
Richard Combs		
Reviews	<b>Living Cinema</b>	121
	Colin Young	
	<b>The Art of Walt Disney</b>	122
David Curtis		
<b>A Heritage of Horror</b>	122	
Philip Strick		

*On the cover: Sarah Ellis in 'Comrade Jacob', directed by Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo. Photograph: Bob Davies*

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# TEN POINTS

## ABOUT THE CRISIS IN THE BRITISH FILM INDUSTRY



David Gordon



It's crisis time in the British film industry again. But what is the British film industry? What does crisis mean? The winter of 1973 and the spring of 1974 have seen the word 'crisis' used with a fair degree of accuracy to cover the industrial situation, the future of energy supplies, the relations of the Government with the trade unions, and the balance of payments position. If there is a crisis in the film industry, it is in danger of being engulfed in the avalanche of crises. It is time to examine the current state of British films unemotionally—otherwise any case for reform or help will be ignored. Apart from the movie enthusiasts, mostly in the concrete bunker of the National Film Theatre, British films lack friends. Theatre, music, opera—all the longer-established arts—have friends in high places and myriads of followers in lower places. Film has been losing its cinema audiences and its glamour, and has so rarely ventured into the realms of the socially relevant that it cannot claim respect as a Cassandra.

People are bored by the perennial crisis in the British film industry, and have long suspected that there has been an exaggeration typical of film people in its depiction. Facts and figures are scarce. The Department of Trade and Industry's series on cinema statistics for 1972 did not appear until 1974. The Film Production Association claims to have collected statistics illustrating the decline in production funds—but says they are confidential. The unions are always ready to name a high unemployment figure, but seem less ready to substantiate it. Since the industry is so willing to hide its darkness under a bushel, it allows outside observers, like this writer, to come to their own conclusions. They are summarised as ten facts, opinions and debating points about the industry.

#### 1. There is no crisis in the film industry

No country can claim a film industry as of right. The continuing production of feature films requires some combination of the following ingredients: (a) a profitable market, so that the business can generate the money to make films which fill the spectrum from Art to Entertainment; (b) subsidies from governments, so that the commercial logic of the market-place, which dictates the quantity and style of films made, can be ignored; (c) pushfulness, zest, ego-mania, burning ambition or whatever on the part of the producer or director so that money can be found, and films made, against all the odds; (d) the creative, technical resources to make films good enough to attract audiences. In 1973, according to the spasmodically reliable *Cinema TV Today* (the trade paper), 80 films were made with British financial involvement. This is a rather higher number than in preceding years. On the face of it, things are not as black as all that.

It is cruel, but somewhat true, to say that the crisis is invented by many studio technicians, who are employed but should not be; by freelance technicians who are unemployed because they are not employable; by producers whose films should remain unproduced; and by the press, for whom 'crisis in the British film industry' is a hardy perennial.

The cause for lament has been that the financial investment was reported as being down to \$62m (in fact *Cinema TV Today* misprinted this as £62m). But is this necessarily cause for alarm? Films have been made too expensively in the past. Britain has too many film studios, and they are staffed on a full-time basis when they should not be. For the understandable reason that security of employment is largely preferable to casual employment, the ACTT and NATKE have fought for, and won, the position of salaried employees for the technicians at Shepperton, Pinewood and Elstree. The total number of full-time employees at these studios is now some

1,200, costing the industry not less than £2.0m in fixed overheads. Since these technicians come with the studio, many films that might otherwise come to a studio stay on location so that the makers can pick their own crews and have more scope for economising. Use of the studio means paying a studio overhead higher than need be. In the short term, the technicians have security of employment; but in the long term they lose this once the crunch comes. The new management at British Lion persuaded an ever more realistic ACTT to accept a reduction in the size of Shepperton, on the understanding that British Lion would continue to finance and make films. When MGM pulled out last year, EMI was faced with an annual loss at Elstree. The unions accepted a reduction of the established staff.

While the finger of 'crisis' is pointed at the plight of these studios, no one mentions that Bray and Twickenham are busy most of the time because they can be rented on a four-wall basis. That is, the production unit pays rent and electricity, and hires its own crew and equipment. The outfits that supply freelance rent equipment, like Samuelsons and Lee Electrics and Bray itself, and supply freelance scenery builders, carpenters and so forth, like FTV Scenery, are busy—either on films, or television, or exhibition fitting. (FTV Scenery fitted out

the new Biba store.) That is as it should be. Making films is a craft whose skills are applicable to other things. It is nonsense for there to be film studios full of film technicians who are paid to be unemployed on not making films. They add to the industry's overhead and reduce its chances.

Moving down the production line of the institutions that constitute 'the industry' which is in 'crisis', there next come the production companies. These are the little one-man-and-his-Friday offices in which scripts are read and packages dreamt up and producers live on yesterday's profits and today's oddments. They come and go, talking of a television series on Michelangelo. Next are the British production/distribution companies: The Rank Organisation, of whose £68m in pre-tax profits a minus £300,000 came from production and distribution. In the last six years, it has spent all of £9m on making films, which run the gamut of emotional experiences from the *Carry Ons* to *The Belstone Fox*. It has avoided any possible crisis by limiting involvement. EMI launched into films in a fit of enthusiasm at the worst possible time, 1970, when the American majors, natural partners for the kind of films EMI should have been making, were ferociously economising. The head of production, now Mr. Nat Cohen, has backed some winners in the past, but tends to play safe. He claims, with some justice, that the Americans lure away the talent with high salaries and the prestige that still surrounds a major distributor. The new British Lion is now a small part of Lion International, an exceptionally well-run international outdoor poster company, and is using the security of its advertising revenues to back up the risky business of film financing; its profits are some £2m and it is committing money in a sensible way to film-making: it uses its own funds—but also looks for outside finance. It put up one-third of *Don't Look Now*, an American finance company put up a third, and Paramount put up a third (roughly—film deals are never simple). Hemdale is another company that has sensibly divided its risks and thereby cut its losses. All these companies are spending money on film production. Their budgeted expenditure this year is over £8m. Crisis?

Next down the line come the American distributors, who have financed the bulk of 'British' film-making in Britain. In terms of financial health, the American majors have never looked better. They have suffered and slimmed and are now back making pictures and profits. MGM's decision to quit

#### The waste of studios

	permanent employees	loss
Pinewood (Rank)	604	£227,000 (1)
Elstree (EMI)	260	£750,000 (2)
Shepperton (Lion)	310	£400,000 (3)

(1) 1972.

(2) 1973 after allowing for the ending of the £175,000 annual contribution from MGM. Employees since reduced from 470.

(3) Estimated current rate of annual loss.



movies in favour of gambling (one of the most ironic decisions in the whole history of gambling) has strengthened the position of the others. Except for Columbia, the 1969-1971 crisis of the majors is over. Their demise would have been really serious for Britain; the flow of films would have dried up.

On to exhibition. There are four major chains in Britain: Rank with 248 screens (exhibition profits of £2.3m in 1973); EMI with 275 screens (exhibition profits of some £3m in 1972); Star with 155 screens (£1.4m in 1971, including bingo); Granada with 33 screens (£529,000 from cinemas and bingo halls); and Classic, which was recently up for sale by Mr. Laurie Marsh's company with the expectation that the chain's 100-odd cinemas would make a pre-tax profit of some £1m. The total number of cinemas open at the end of 1972 was 1,519—an increase for the first time since the 1940s. Total pre-tax profits from exhibition of these groups = £8m. Is this figure misleading? Let us hear a corrected one from the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association.

From all the identifiable elements in the film industry comes the hum of profit-making—except the studios. The 'crisis' there is that they grew fat on the explosion of American finance in the 1960s. In three years, 1967-1969, the Americans were responsible for the bulk of a never-to-be-repeated splurge of foreign investment in the British film industry of £100m. The inflow is now down from over £30m a year in pounds which were worth more in the

pocket than now to under £20m. It may fall further. That gap, between the golden days of the 1960s and nasty old now, is what has generated crisis-talk. The crisis is mostly one of readjustment. Mostly, but not entirely.

## 2. Not enough good British films are being made

This is a great pity, but hardly a crisis. There are not enough good novels being written either. However, given Britain's excellent actors, dramatists and technicians, given the high standards of television compared to all other countries, given the wealth of its cultural heritage, it is surprising that so few British films (forgetting the nationality of the finance) are shocking, funny, fantastic, realistic, dramatic or in any mode expressive of original creativity. *A Touch of Class*, *Don't Look Now*, *The Final Programme*, and a few other honourable exceptions, are overwhelmed by the wave of nonentity films or television rip-offs on the roster of 1973 films.

The British are good at making films—which is why the Americans still make quite a fair number of films aimed at the world market in Britain—but they are rather bad at producing films. On the whole, producers are not very nice or polite. A producer has to con bankers and distributors into handing over a small fortune by making them believe they will make a large fortune, when the chances are they will lose the lot. He has to be prepared to be rude to his director,

aggressive to the distributor, charming to his stars, persuasive to his banker, on drinking terms with his writers. This combination of personal qualities seems to be rare in Britain. Even rarer is to find a producer who, having earned a fat fee, is willing to invest a few bob in preparing his next project.

To make matters worse, quite a number of producers have managed to become far richer than the state of the industry would seem to allow. If the unions cut their own throats by demanding first-class travel on the way to locations, they have been encouraged by the unrealistic fees of the producers, the de luxe hotels, the separate canteens, the limousines at the airport. One of the few City banks in recent years to put a lot of money into film-making was taken to the cleaners; this does not inspire confidence among the money men, who tend to remember not Sir Alexander Korda's successes, but his excesses. Had much of the frippery money been invested in buying the options to books (which are surprisingly cheap) and getting screenplays written, many of today's unemployed producers could be behind a camera.

## 3. The film industry is not desperately short of cash

Shortage of investment capital is the most common excuse quoted for the low level of film production in Britain. It is—and it isn't. Judging from the letters written to *The Times* a few months ago, the film

## The non-shortage of finance

		1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Distributors' gross from 'British' films Eady		£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
	(a)	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.6	8.3	9.1	9.3
	(b)	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.2	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.2
		12.1	12.0	12.0	11.7	11.6	12.5	13.5	13.5
Distributors' gross from foreign films	(c)	13.4	13.6	12.4	12.7	12.3	12.5	11.8	13.0
		25.5	25.6	24.4	24.4	23.9	25.0	25.3	26.5
Less: money sent abroad	(d)	16.7	17.1	14.7	14.3	14.0	12.9	14.3	18.1
		8.8	8.5	9.7	10.1	9.9	12.1	11.0	8.4
Add: money received from abroad	(e)	10.0	11.5	12.0	8.7	9.6	9.2	11.2	10.1
Cash generated by British film industry	(f)	18.8	20.0	21.7	18.8	19.5	21.3	22.2	18.5
Finance from abroad	(g)	17.4	21.0	33.4	35.8	31.1	17.5	22.8	18.3
		36.2	41.0	55.1	54.6	50.6	38.8	45.0	36.8
Domestic sources of finance		?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Available for production and domestic distribution costs		36.2+	41.0+	55.1+	54.6+	50.6+	38.8+	45.0+	36.8+

Sources: DTI Business Monitor M2 Cinema Statistics; Trade and Industry August 9, 1973.



business is broke. This is many millions of pounds from the truth. The table, compiled from the DTI statistics on the cinema and combined with its balance of payments figures for the film industry, shows that the film business generates between £18m and £20m a year—before taking account of the wildly fluctuating amounts of production finance coming across the exchanges from abroad (nearly all from the United States) and the unknown amount of new finance raised in Britain.

In film economics, money flows from the cinemas like a cascade pouring into one bucket after another as in some primitive irrigation system. It rains in at the cinemas, some £66m a year, and the Customs and Excise immediately tap off £6m for Value Added Tax. Then the British Film Fund Agency takes off 'Eady' money which pays for the National Film School, the Children's Film Foundation and a small grant to the BFI Production Board, leaving nearly £4m to flow straight back to the producers of 'British' films. (A 'British' film is one that has mostly British labour, irrespective of who is financing the movie.) This leaves the cinemas with £56m, of which £20m is paid over to distributors for the hire of the films and the rest used to pay some 11,000 full-time and 14,000 part-time employees, the rent or depreciation on 1,500 cinemas, and the lighting and heating bills. Of the £20m that is the distributors' gross, nearly half is in respect of 'British' films, some £8m-£9m a year, to which can be added the £4m of Eady. Thus the cash generated by showing British and foreign films is £12m-£13m plus £12m, or about £24m.

As one would expect, however, a lot of the money received from showing foreign films flows out of this country back to the country of origin—mostly the United States. But the amount of money remitted exceeds the foreign films' gross: since most of the 'British' films are financed by American money, part of the 'British' films' gross returns to the United States as well.

If that were the end of the story, righteous anger would be raised against the Americans for, in effect, taking Eady out of the country, and leaving the British industry starved of cash. But, surprisingly, British films earn quite a fair sum abroad—around £10m a year (presumably after the deduction of foreign distribution costs). One can assume that they are British films rather than 'British' films, as the foreign receipts of the latter would flow straight back to the United States. And in order to make 'British' films, the Americans pour in year by year more dollars than they take out.

Figures tend to bewilder; and most of the historic arguments about the British film industry have proceeded merrily without them. But as far as they go, the available figures show that from the operations of showing films in Britain and abroad, the film industry generates nearly £20m a year to meet the costs of production and domestic distribution. In addition, another £20m a year has been injected into the making of pictures in Britain from abroad.

The figures for 1973 are not yet available. They will perhaps show that the Americans decided to cut back even further their annual cash injection into Britain. One of the main, and unflattering, reasons for the

high level of American investment in Britain, which kept it rather above its station as an important world centre of production, was that the dollar was overvalued until the devaluation of late 1971, which meant that Americans got a lot of production £s for their dollars. In 1972, the American majors were still carrying out commitments entered into in 1971, and so one would expect the 'Come back to Hollywood' movement to start biting during 1973. Now that the dollar has again strengthened against the pound, there is an economic reason for the American majors, multinational ogres that they are, to return to making films in the cheapest market. The investment levels of 1967-1969 are over; the majors' total world investment in films has been cut back to more modest levels once and for all. Unless inflation in Britain removes the advantages of the exchange rate, it seems reasonable to predict that the Americans will continue to spend between £10m and £20m on making movies in Britain. With inflation at the current gallop, that is a big if. A progressive attitude by the ACTT and a pile of good scripts might be the best counter-inflation policy to that. A few more British hits like *Don't Look Now* would help.

### How the movie money flows

Box office takings		£m
Value Added Tax		68
		6 → the Government
		—
		62
Paid by cinemas to British Film Fund Agency 'Eady Levy' (b)		4
		—
		58
Exhibitors retain		36 → wages, rent, profit
		—
Distributors' gross in respect of Foreign films (c) 13		22 — paid by exhibitors for film hire
'British' films (a) 9		—
		22
		—
Eady fund payment for British films (b)		4
		—
Distributors' gross plus Eady		26
Payments to foreigners for films shown (d) (18)		—
Receipts from films shown abroad (e) 10		—
		—
Net payment abroad		(8)
Cash generated by British film industry (f)		18 — available for domestic distribution and production costs
Money invested in film production from abroad (g)		18
Money invested in production from British sources		? — no figures available
		—
<b>Total available for production</b>		<b>36+</b>

1972 figures — with VAT shown for illustration.  
Letters in brackets refer to line of table on page 68.

#### 4. The Eady Fund is a key element in the financial and legislative structure that enables films to be made in Britain

The distributors' gross on British films was £9.3m in 1972. To this was added the £4m of Eady. Its importance is clear: Eady adds nearly half to what the average 'British' picture can take in its home market. Producers claim that it is an essential part of their financial projections. Take the projections for the recent Rank film, *The Belstone Fox*:

	£
Cost	361,000
Prints and advertising	86,000
	—
Projected direct costs	447,000
	—
Projected distributors' gross Britain	200,000
Plus Eady	94,000
Overseas	200,000
	—
	494,000

Rank says that without Eady it would not have made the film. Clearly, some big-budget films which are made in Britain and



obtain Eady money would still have been made without it: the James Bond films for example. Overall, the hope of getting Eady plays an important part in the projections of both British and Americans. It should be emphasised that it is the hope of getting Eady, the anticipation, which is the important factor. The producers cannot be sure of getting any: Eady is distributed in proportion to how well the film does at the box-office in relation to other British films.

Mr. Leon Clore, an independent producer, has proposed a radical alteration to Eady. Only 15 per cent of the levy would be paid out on the present basis, according to how well the films do at the box-office. Thus only some £600,000 would flow back to producers/distributors. The remaining £3.4m would go into a British Film Finance Corporation, a production fund to finance, by itself or with partners, the making of low budget, genuinely British films. The Corporation would not have to make a profit, and would take over from the existing National Film Finance Corporation, which does have to try to make one.

The trouble with the Clore scheme is that it takes that element of anticipation clean away. Since there is no chance of hitting a substantial part of a jackpot £4m big, the gamblers who have been putting up money to make films in Britain will be more reluctant to do so. On the one hand, an annual fund £3.4m large, making, perhaps, worthy British films, chosen by a managing director on a short renewable contract; on the other, the possibility of much of £40m evaporating away. Not that the levy is perfect. There should be a limit to the amount that the successful film can take out of the fund: *Goldfinger* took a fifth of the fund one year. There should be a special award for films of merit that do not do well at the box-office. But, on the whole, the levy is a piece of financial irrigation that has helped more film-making to take place in Britain than can be justified by the size of the market.

#### 5. There should be subsidies for films

The distinction between 'good' films and commercial films is now more obscure than ever before. Some of the former make money without losing their integrity, some of the latter are the former. The mass audience has broken down into a series of mini markets which are often big enough to reward critical acclaim with financial success.

Mr. Clore wants to make 'British films, with British talent . . . the new and sole criterion of investment should be the merit of the script and the production.' He has the admirable ambition of promoting 'good' films—but his frame of reference is that non-commercial equals good. That equation was never true, and is less so now than ever.

What is true is that the entrepreneurial activity of getting a film together (an activity which is no less entrepreneurial when carried out in socialist countries) has the chance of turning out 'good' films in direct relation to the number of different sources of finance which are available. In the last resort, the decision to back, or not to back, a film is one man's hunch against another. The more men, the more hunches. The more separate channels of cash, the more men. Twenty-one separate companies

produced at least one of the 80 films made in Britain last year, each hoping for a chunk of Eady money. Take away Eady and there is a risk of losing 21 speculative makers of films. In these circumstances, gaining one man, be he ever so tried and true and £3.4m a year rich, looks a bad bargain.

There is a strong case for having an additional decision-making centre with its own source of finance—but it must not be Eady. The obvious source is the Government, which, through the Arts Council, spends £3.0m on the theatre and £3.1m on opera and dance. The case is similar and familiar. Just as money is spent on the theatre, even though there is commercial theatre, money should be spent on film, even though there is commercial cinema. The case is as strong during times of cinema boom as cinema crisis. It should not be that the cinema needs to be bailed out, or that commercial cinema is inherently inartistic; it is that a government-refilled film fund would have a different set of prejudices and preoccupations from the businessmen who have to look over their shoulders to their bosses in Los Angeles, or the cautious men who worry about their shareholders. The result may not be very different, but there is enough unexplored scope in film for the guardians of tomorrow's cultural heritage to consider the cinema a suitable case for generous treatment.

In crisis-ridden 1974, the case is likely to be passed up. Everyone is short of money for all causes, the good and very good. The cinema should start now on what will be a very long and hard struggle to convince all and sundry—the politicians, the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry, the people at large who are glued to the small screen—that film deserves culture money, not as a lame industrial duck, but as another form of expression to be encouraged. The struggle is going to be a hard one.

#### 6. Television is killing off the grey goose that lays the golden ratings

When *The Great Escape* was shown by the BBC, 21m people—over a tenth of the total cinema admissions in a year—sat at home and watched it. Over the Christmas period, a two-week fiesta, the BBC showed 46 films on its two channels, of which 19 were less than ten years old. Nearly 1,000 feature films a year are shown on British television. The general excellence of British television compared with the television services of other countries explains in large part why the decline in cinema admissions is more dramatic in Britain than in every other country in the world for which figures are available. One reason for its excellence, in the eyes of its audience, is the large number of feature films shown. In Italy, television is restricted in the number of films it can show; in France, certain days are free of movies; in Germany, the television service pays a Danegeld to the film industry. But in Britain, television has sucked up the mass audience using the vacuum cleaner of the mass audience's mass entertainment—and gives precious little in return. Eventually, television could kill off the feature film made for the large screen—and its audience will have to make do with those very inferior made-for-television movies.

Just as the British film industry once had to be protected from the full rigours of American competition, so many industry types dream of protection from television. This is impossible. Even if television were not allowed to show movies, it is unlikely that many people would troop out to the local cinema; they would watch whatever was substituted. But a new relationship needs to be found, and it is legitimate to call on the Government to help define it.

Television in Britain pays too little for movies—for its own good or that of the film industry. Television is currently paying an average of £3,000 per network (BBC or ITV) showing of a feature—which is some improvement on the past. An hour of prime-time original programming costs some £60,000. Movies are not only popular—they are cheap. They are cheap because distributors have sold them at stupid prices. But there is an economic reason for this. There are many of them, none of whom individually has much bargaining power, and only two buyers: the man from the BBC, Mr. Gunnar Rugheimer, or the man from ITV, Mr. Leslie Halliwell. In such an imperfect market, classical economics predicts that the sellers would weakly cave in, as they do. The classical remedy is some kind of protection for the weak. A central selling agency (as for diamonds) is not going to work in films, where nothing, especially movies and trust, is forever. The withholding of product for five years, as currently practised, is doubly stupid: the film is eventually shown—and for less money than if it was newer. A total ban would protect cinemas a little—but prevent the producer and distributor finding the missing millions at home.

Two, possibly linked, solutions seem sensible. The first is to make the television companies pay a movie-levy for each showing: the suggestion is a minimum £1,000, or 10 per cent of the purchase price. The money would then go to the National Film Finance Corporation and back into the making of more features. This would, however, have different effects on the BBC and ITV. Unless the television licence fee is increased, or the BBC is reimbursed by the government, any more money spent on films means less spent on other programmes; alternatively, this monopsonist buyer will offer less money to the distributor or will buy less films. For the commercial television companies, who now pay their advertising levy on gross profits instead of simply on revenue, the movie-levy would merely reduce their liability to the advertising levy.

The second solution would help the BBC out of the predicament. Television should provide finance for film production: if linked to the movie-levy, any money invested in production could be deducted from the levy payable. This would give television some financial control (which would be beneficial, as television-making is much more economical than movie-making usually is), and some artistic involvement. Scratch most television producers and there is a film director yearning to get out. Since television would be a financial partner, it could demand to screen the film on TV well before the five-year prohibition period that applies in the case of other films.

The idea of television investing in feature films is not new. The American networks



tried it—not very successfully—but were in any case warned that they were in danger of breaking the anti-trust ban on film distributor/producers controlling their outlets, which had made movie companies split off their cinemas. Sir Lew Grade made a couple of films with Shirley MacLaine to lure her into a television series. Neither the films nor the series did well, but he now reckons to have learnt a few lessons. He has just made a \$3m film with Julie Andrews and Omar Sharif, *The Tamarind Seed*, and is planning four more this year at a total cost of \$10m. 'The great thing about films is that their value goes on forever,' Sir Lew's financing depends on pre-selling the films to American television for very much more than he, wearing his television hat, could possibly pay in Britain. When asked whether British television should pay more for films he grimaced and said, 'We only show features late at night, except for Sundays. We can do without them.'

And now the BBC is thinking of putting up £25,000 as part of a package of finance for a feature film, in return for which it wants the right to show the film on BBC-2 soon after the West End opening. Television people argue that showing a film on television increases its box-office appeal; movie people tend not to agree. The BBC experiment—if it comes off—will be watched with great interest. One hurdle that has to be jumped is the Eady levy; if the film is partly financed by television the producers might forfeit the right to Eady, because it would count as a TV film.

All hurdles in getting television involved with film-making will seem bigger if television does not want to jump voluntarily. Television will scream 'political interference' if the Minister for Posts and Telecommunications tries to force either or both solutions on it. The Treasury will make a fuss if commercial companies reduce their advertising levy by spending money on films. And a lot of people will ask 'Why support the film industry anyway?' The best answer is that the film industry is supporting television.

## 7. Films need cinemas

There is a new conventional wisdom about film: it is merely stuff in a can. The stuff might just as well be videotape, long-playing video discs (due from Philips Lamp in 1975) or some yet-to-be discovered material. The stuff can be shown in cinemas, on broadcast television, on cable television or on a video-player that uses television. The message is that the medium is irrelevant. The cinema industry may die, but canned art/entertainment will live on.

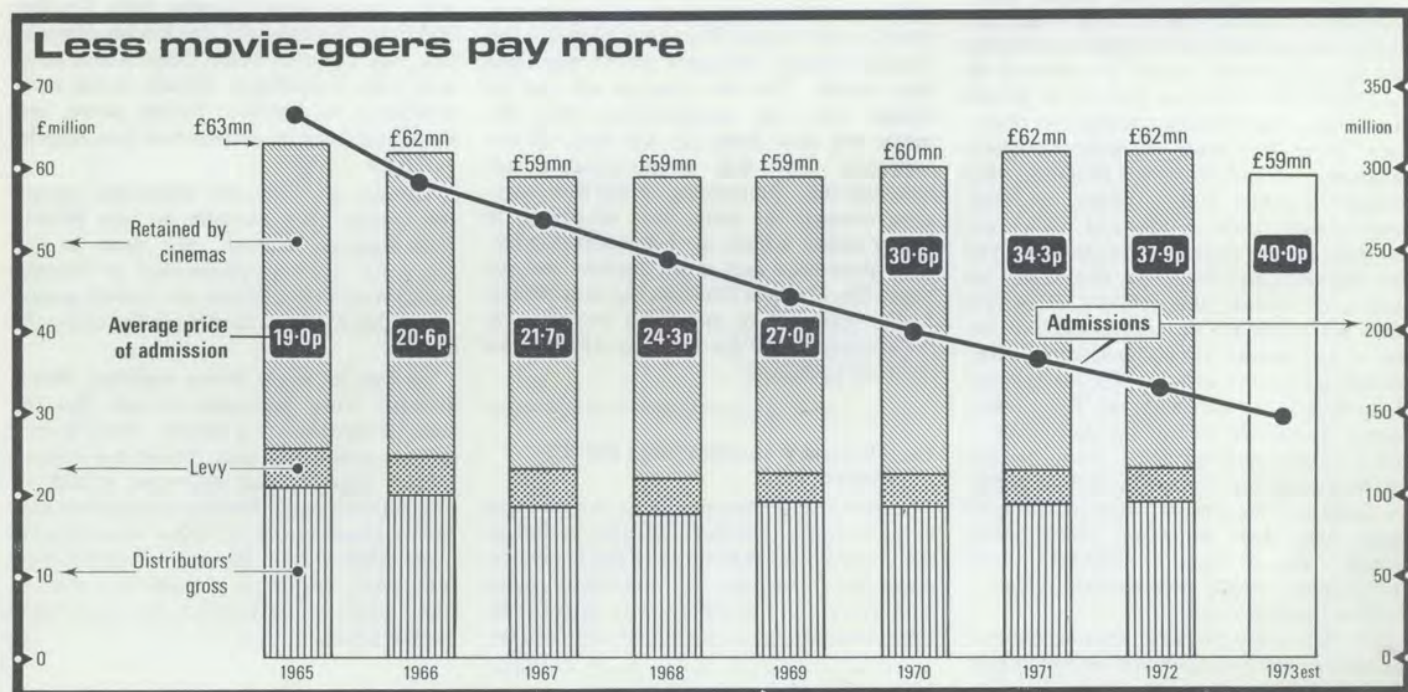
This videoview of the future is excessively technocratic. The small screen has a different (some would argue smaller) impact than the large. If films ceased being made for the cinema, films would be different. The future of cinemas, of the exhibition side of the film industry, is thus of importance for the future of film production. This is an obvious point, but often ignored by those whose futurism sees cellular units of habitation plugged into the wired city and who are therefore inclined to treat the experience of going to the cinema as a passing historical phase.

The contraction of the exhibition side of the British film industry has been dramatic. In the mid-1950s, when the Rank Organisation's Sir (then Mr.) John Davis told the film industry that 'nothing can stop a material contraction in the number of cinemas operating in the western world,' Britain had 4,500 cinemas; it now has 1,500. Admissions have fallen from 1.2 billion a year in 1955 to 150m in 1973. As the chart shows, the level of receipts has kept up only because seat prices have offset the decline in admissions. But when most industries are seeing sales increases of 10 per cent a year, which keeps pace with inflation, cinema receipts stay roughly the same in pound terms, which means it is losing out in real terms. The effect of turning single cinemas into twins, trios and quartets does not seem to have stemmed the tide of the admission ebb, though it is still too early to be sure. Although most of 1973 was miserable for the film industry because of the exceptionally

good weather and the introduction of Value Added Tax, at the beginning of 1974 the takings from *Enter the Dragon* and *The Sting*, and encouraging reports from the United States on *The Exorcist*, *Serpico*, *American Graffiti* and *Papillon*, have convinced the occupational optimists that it is going to be a boom year. Perhaps the turning point has been reached. Certainly 1973 was a bad year all round.

Although the cinema chains are making profits, one can hardly accuse them of being over-intelligent in the use of their property. Just how unintelligent they had been was brought home by the activities of Mr. Laurie Marsh, who bought the Classic chain, closed some cinemas down, twinned and tripled some, did some property developments, and plans to sell the rest—some 93 cinemas making £1m a year—having made a profit of something like £9m from beginning to end. It is a pity that so little of this profit was ploughed back into the industry; but Mr. Marsh's excursions into film distribution and production did not have the same golden touch. Rank and EMI, the two dominant chains, having weathered the abuse of those who accused them of not doing enough with their sites, now have to weather the abuse of those who see the incarnation of evil in any kind of property development. The fact is that the return from a specialised shell housing a small number of people for a tiny fraction of the week cannot often be justified, either in terms of the use of space, or of capital, unless the shell itself is part of something else.

Unless the missing millions return to the cinemas, even the slimmed and thinned cinemas, distributors are going to have to look elsewhere to avoid the squeeze between inflation and static box-office receipts. The prime importance of the cinema as the viewing place for films should not blind film-makers to alternative sources of income—from television, broadcast or cable, and from cassettes. The stuff in the can is itself rather like real estate: it can be rented out to various owners, and it does not have





its value used up. What cinemagoers and owners have to realise is that the more and diverse the sources of income for films, the more likely will the film-makers be able to come up with those Good Films exhibitors always place their faith in.

## 8. There are no easy solutions

Several radical solutions for the film industry have recently been proposed, each of which has attracted only very small support—a common fate of radical solutions.

The ACTT has proposed the nationalisation of the film industry, because the union thinks that nationalisation of anything is *ipso facto* good, and because the free enterprise film industry has not kept its members in the style of employment to which they would like to grow accustomed. There are several drawbacks to the nationalisation argument. The film industry consists of fixed assets (cinemas and studios), nationalisation of which accomplishes nothing except the transfer of ownership from Rank or whoever to the state; and people, engaged in distribution and production, who would either set up shop outside the nationalised bits of the industry, close shop, or have to be employed by the state. Once the state, in the shape of the local decision units, has the power of decision over what gets made and shown, why should the results be better than now? If the state increases the level of production above an economic level—i.e., if the money coming back from the state cinemas through the state distribution organisation to the state production house is insufficient to cover the costs of production—then either the rest of the community must agree to subsidise the state film industry, or make fewer films. As has been argued, there is a good argument for subsidies—but nationalisation makes that argument weaker.

Another radical solution has been put forward by Mr. Michael Relph, Chairman of the Film Production Association. The allocation of part, preferably the whole, of the 4th television channel to independent production companies who would make programmes specially for it. TV4 would take advertising, and any surplus after meeting the cost of programmes would be invested in the production of feature films to be shown in cinemas. This would achieve two objectives: those who want to make television programmes but do not want to join the big companies could find a home for their programmes (both BBC and ITV are reluctant to buy material from outside their own portals); and television would pay its dues to the feature film industry. However, there are other strong contenders for the last of the over-air television channels, like education and the existing TV companies. If there is to be a surplus on TV4, many people would fail to see the justice of it going to the film industry. Most people regard the decline of the film industry, like the decline of the cotton textile industry, as tough luck. Just as cotton textile mills cannot claim a share of synthetic fibre profits, films cannot automatically claim a displaced person's share.

Mr. Relph also proposes another course: the extension of pay television on which new films can be shown to a paying public. The

immediate authorisation of such a system might not lead to the desired results. There are a dozen pay television experiments being conducted in the United States, and the results have not been too encouraging so far, even though the constant interruptions on broadcast television makes cable relatively much more attractive than in Britain. Pay cable television will have a hard struggle against free broadcast television.

During the election campaign, Mr. Hugh Jenkins\* came up with Labour's plan for the arts, including a scheme to save the flagging film industry. Half the Eady money (rather than 85 per cent) would be Clored into a new production fund, to which the government would add a subsidy for non-profit making films or films made for the public good and of high quality. A promise of more promise is that all responsibility for film would pass in future to the Arts Minister: at present, film is deeply buried in the philistine bowels of the Department of Trade and Industry. The suggestion of a publicly owned circuit of cinemas is old and silly. Anyway, there is already in existence a chain of 43 non-commercial full and part-time cinemas run by the British Film Institute. Why not simply expand that?

## 9. Management is weak

*'The sadness in Britain is the lack of leadership of the owners of film companies, of producers, of people who can organise talent.'*—MICHAEL WINNER, director, fully employed.

*'The administrative people in television are of a higher calibre than those in film.'*—JOSEPH LOSEY, director, usually employed.

Exhibitors are unimaginative, distributors are thick, producers are greedy, financiers are over-cautious. Each sector of the film business is a very acute critic of the others. The trouble is that they are all more right than wrong. EMI was asked to put up £20,000 so that a £200,000 television campaign for the soundtrack of *That'll Be the Day* on television should promote the film as well as the record; it refused. It did not even have a map of the television company areas to see which of its cinemas fitted in with them. Too many films hit the circuits without adequate advertising, and then vanish. Too few cinemas are run by people who can communicate with the under 26s that make up the bulk of the audience. Too few bright people are attracted into the running of the film business—though the same kind of person is happy doing admin at Television Centre. The glamorous end is production and, to quote Mr. Graham Dowson, the next boss of Rank, 'Film is an emotional business. A lot of people look for industry solutions to personal problems.'

## 10. There is a modest hope for the future

The evidence as presented here is that there is no crisis in the film industry, except at the studios, and that there is the money to make films. Against the opinion of most authorities, it is probably even possible to make films designed for the British market

\* Now Minister for the Arts.

that are not television rip-offs—provided the budget is very much more modest than is currently considered 'cheap', and provided that television directs some finance towards the film industry. This requires a different and cheaper style of life by the producer, and even less restrictive practices by the unions.

British films have traditionally been aimed at the wrong place: they are too expensive for Britain, and too parochial for the international market. Now that the National Film Finance Corporation is good and poor, new attitudes towards the cost of production might be learnt. By the use of better organisation and more thorough planning, smaller crews and cheaper lodgings, television gets more production value out of the pound than do films. Cheaper British films do not mean worse British films.

But the ratio of risk to reward is constantly shifting out of the producer's favour: the box-office gross and Eady money stands still while inflation mounts. As the risks grow, there is a tendency to become even more cautious. The adventurous find even less of an outlet in the commercial cinema, which increases the argument for subsidy: subsidy which should be independent of the state of the industry.

The more expensive films should be financed primarily by the American majors, most of whom are now back in the peak of financial health. Since they have the largest domestic market in the world their films are always going to tend to dominate the international screens, as their large production costs can be recouped before they are exported. Their powerful export organisations give the films with international appeal (which do not have to be amorously international in character) a very strong push. They are the natural partners for any ambitious European film-maker, which is why Dino De Laurentiis has moved to the United States, and why top British directors work for them. That is no matter for regret. It is these film-makers that will tempt American money back into Britain. Paramount has been thinking of setting up a Directors' Company, analogous to the one with Francis Ford Coppola, Billy Friedkin and Peter Bogdanovich, for British directors like Jack Clayton, Peter Yates, Karel Reisz and John Schlesinger. Britain needs more producers to assemble British talent, and then bang hard on the doors in Los Angeles and New York.

Despite the EEC, the Americans remain the natural film partners for the British. The language matters. But there is still scope for more co-production in Europe, which keeps the Italians and French going, but which has been hardly used at all by the British.

As *Day for Night* shows, making a film is a hassle from beginning to end. But the start of shooting is a victory. Most battles are lost well before that. There is not much money around, and everyone would be happier with more. But there is some money. Filthy lucre that it is, those who want to make films within any sort of commercial framework, and most of those who want to make films outside it, have to get their hands dirty digging. ■





# AND JOHN BOORMAN

**Philip Strick**

The head is a ferocious Greek mask, hacked from stone, its eyes fixed in a malevolent, glittering stare. Monstrous and impossible, it sinks out of the clouds to settle upon a raw and ugly landscape where tiny savage figures gallop to the welcome. A voice resonant with self-importance booms from the snarling mouth, instructing the followers of Zardoz to kill all lesser beings; the words are reinforced by a gush of weapons from between the gigantic stone teeth, and sabres, rifles and ammunition rain down over the eager horsemen. One of them snatches up a pistol, spins triumphantly to face us, and is briefly recognisable as Sean Connery before the crash of the shot extinguishes our vision in a black flood. The year is 2293, the time has come (as Eliot promised) to murder and create, and a magic lantern throws the nerves in patterns on a screen.

After *Deliverance*, nobody can expect a film by John Boorman to be a comfortable experience; even so, *Zardoz* has its audience out for the count before the credits are through. The opening scene, a blasphemous compilation of the incredible and the familiar, threatens to overbalance at any moment from its outrageous tightrope and plunge into the ridiculous—but Boorman, acrobat as well as clown, has prepared the Fall in every detail. Accept the massive stone scowl at, as it were, face value, and it's as plausible as any other totem; reject it, and anti-gravity devices are at hand. The whole thing is an ingenious sham, and it's no great disaster if we glimpse a few strings. They lead us into a labyrinth of myths,

memories and meanings where a truth can be unravelled that is as simple or as elusive as we care to make it. In its direct assault upon our security, the gunshot at the audience is both an insult and a release; kept at pistol's length from the character with whom we would otherwise identify, we are free to question and to evaluate everything he does. We rely on him to lead the way but we are disinclined to trust him. Which is, as it turns out, just as well—for even in the case of this seemingly arbitrary example of homicidal potency, some very long strings indeed are being pulled.

Unquestioning as Bradbury's fireman in *Fahrenheit 451*, Zed the Exterminator obeys the demands of Zardoz the God until,

like Montag and many another rebel of the future, he turns a page or two and realises that there are alternatives. Pistol in hand, he stows away in the mouth of the flying sculpture and is carried to the Vortex, a brilliant oasis of indolent intelligence where the Eternals live in immortal boredom and sterility, their petulant misdemeanours punished by senility, their occasional suicides by prompt resurrection. Fascinated by Zed, they argue over his fate; one group, headed by Consuela (Charlotte Rampling) wants him destroyed, while another, headed by May (Sara Kestelman), insists that he should be studied for a while. During the contest that follows, Zed acquires an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Vortex and its purpose, confronts the forces that enclose it, and restores to its delighted, centuries-old inhabitants the ability to remain dead when they die. The process of evolution is released once more, and the natural history of man can resume its course.

The story is Boorman's own, but science fiction holds honourable precedents for it. The ashen wastes of the Outlands, where the Exterminators in their frowning Zardoz helmets ride in pursuit of the Brutals (shabbily suited like tired businessmen), have been the familiar setting for many a



disaster novel in which the atomic war has come and gone or the planet's resources have at last expired. The Vortex, smugly enclosed within its force shield, is like many a glowing citadel awaiting a sword-and-sorcery Hero to breach its walls, cutting through the ranks of defenders and the pages of swashbuckle until foolishly tapped on the back of the neck at the moment of victory. Science fiction, too, has many times sent generations of space pioneers on a journey so immense that its purpose is forgotten until, at the last moment, balance is restored by the response to pre-set stimuli.

Boorman takes all these, like fragments of half-remembered folklore, and uses them to set out once again the theme for which we know him best—the vital and inevitable impact of one culture on another. As in *Deliverance*, an abused and inarticulate primitive society is goaded into revenge on the men who have scorned it. As in *Leo the Last*, an eccentric benefactor watches over the turbulent occupants of his kingdom and encourages them to destroy his own artificial and outdated way of life. As in *Hell in the Pacific*, opposing personalities duel for supremacy until a new equilibrium is established. And in perhaps the closest resemblance of all, Sean Connery slams his way through the startled and disbelieving Vortex with the same cunning (and, where that fails, the same brute force) as Lee Marvin applied to the sophisticated treachery of the Los Angeles underworld in *Point Blank*. Once again, the gun in the fist is the symbol of pig-headed virility, its lethal qualities again proving irrelevant as a solution until other, less easy lessons have been learned. And the final image of *Zardoz* shows the same pistol that once was fired at us, hanging forgotten in dust and cobwebs inside the cavernous mouth of the stone God, awaiting a new revolution that may never come but is more than likely to be needed within a century or so.

Birth and rebirth; the film celebrates the perpetuity of life and death with a rational jumble of contradictions, hopes and regrets. At its centre is the extraordinary image of the glass womb, bodies suspended within its liquids in various stages of reconstruction. The creators of the Vortex have abolished

death, one of the seldom defined but always implicit aims of scientific development, and the result should have been a magnificent infinity of refinement and perfection. Instead, the Eternals are without drive or purpose, their heightened mental powers revealing only that the future offers a living extinction. Yearning for death, they eventually find a way to reintroduce it, and in the courageously horrifying conclusion to *Zardoz* a massacre takes place that is ecstatically welcomed by its victims. Their bodies, splashed with bullet-holes, wriggle life-affirmingly to rest, while Zed retreats to pass on his knowledge without, this time, permitting a machine to do the work instead.

As usual, Boorman keeps up a headlong pace to avoid being crushed by the weight of his argument, and as with *Leo the Last* one suspects that now and again it's a close thing. The narrative of *Zardoz* is carefully dislocated, a dazzling show of conjury that darts between Zed's current predicament and the steps which brought him to it (recalled either on a screen through the Vortex memory banks, or in flashback with the loving assistance of May). Like Zed, we are gradually made aware, in vivid glimpses, of the intolerable plight of the Eternals, some of whom, the Apathetics, have degenerated into almost total immobility, while others, the Renegades, suffer the terrible punishment of endless old age for having dared to complain. Zed slowly fits the pieces together, his energy supplemented by the various contributions of the Eternals themselves, their personalities (like, in a sense, those of the quartet in *Deliverance*) merging to form a single sum of knowledge. In a delightful sequence of lights and colours, Zed is instructed in the range of facts and experiences held by the women of the Vortex, as they in turn draw life from him. Finally he is equipped with the gifts that will enable him to converse with the Tabernacle, which controls the secrets of the Vortex; all evidence assembled, the audience is prepared for Boorman's major show-piece—Zed's battle inside the 'storage space for refracted light patterns', the diamond containing the Tabernacle itself.

Well, perhaps the audience isn't quite

prepared. As with the jolting inferences of his opening scene, Boorman's images (superbly photographed by Geoffrey Unsworth) are so complex that despite the affable guidance provided for Zed and ourselves by the aptly named Friend (John Alderton), an Eternal with a welcome sense of the incongruous and the ironic, the first encounter with *Zardoz* leaves one reeling with questions. The first step, of course, must be to consult Lyman Frank Baum, whose 'modernised fairy-tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out' provides the immediate source for the giant floating head. One recalls that the Wizard is indeed a charlatan, like Arthur Frayn and his painted-on moustachios, and while Zed is an unexpected translation of Dorothy he shares her single-minded opportunism. The emerald city of Oz itself, however, is the most significant factor—a place of such glory that its inhabitants have dark glasses padlocked to their heads. Blindness and perfection locked together, a paradox to please Frankenstein.

'How,' asks the high priestess of the Vortex, 'did we conjure up a monster in our midst, and why? This is the question we must answer.' In contemporary terms, the question can be applied to any monster you care to think of, from the motor-car to the miners' strike. In science fiction terms, the answer (we *had* to, in order to survive) was given almost as soon as Mary Shelley had defined the problem, pessimistically reaffirmed by such as Carlyle, Kipling and Wells. Taking the tone of *Leo the Last* a step further, however, Boorman now demonstrates, Cocteau-fashion, that monsters are not only essential, they are hugely welcome. It's a bold case to make, but he bases it on the irresistible combination of Darwin, Tolkien, and the Arthurian legends. And he uses every cinematic trick he can think of, including the engaging talents of a spectacularly good cast, to win us over. The hints of caricature from his earlier films remain, but rhetoric, like science fiction, thrives on exaggeration. As an end result, *Zardoz* is a luminous and compassionate exploration of what, without our realising it, has for too long been regarded as unexplorable.

## ZARDOZ

### INTERVIEW WITH JOHN BOORMAN

Immaculately suited, his elegant mane of hair neatly tethered at the back of the neck, John Boorman looks a man of several worlds, inhabiting each of them with equal success and energy. In the score of years since he joined ITN as an assistant film editor, his career has sent him to Los Angeles for *Point Blank* ('They're using that film in study courses all over the States,' he says gloomily. 'Can you imagine, I've made a *classic* already?'), the Palau Islands for *Hell in the Pacific*, Notting Hill for *Leo the Last* and North Georgia for *Deliverance*. During most of 1973 he was at Ardmore Studios in Ireland, not too far from his country home, all landscape and children, in County Wicklow. Here he created *Zardoz*, which Fox has snapped up for world-wide release and which is about to challenge *The Exorcist* for the biggest box-office draw in the States. Cheerfully smoking a cigar at Fox's expense, he talks in the lounge of a London hotel, where the traditions of the past lie somewhat heavily, about his venture into the future.

**You wrote the screenplay for *Zardoz* yourself, and have since published it as a novel. What gave you the idea for the story?**

It started in a very different way. I wanted to make a film about the problem

for us of hurtling at such a rate into the future that our emotions are lagging behind, the growing gap between our technological development and where we are emotionally. I wrote the film to begin with as a long story, and then I turned it into a script





'Zardoz': 'the Exterminators . . . ride in pursuit of the Brutals'

which I set a little way in the future, about five years, in order to provide some perspective.

The basic idea was that a university lecturer would become intrigued by a girl student, she would disappear, and he would begin looking for her, his search leading him into the alternative societies, the communes where she lived. I went up to Northern California and visited a number of communes to see what this kind of life was like, and I found it mostly rather sterile; where there was a basic need, some practical sharing, it worked, but the communes based on ideology collapsed at the slightest pressure. Then I started to push the idea more and more into the future, and I became increasingly intrigued about where the commune idea might lead, supposing that our society collapsed and the communes were all that survived. Then I thought of there being an elite of privileged people who would have the technology to survive, using a kind of Earth Spaceship that would be regenerative and protected from the outside world.

From there the story gradually began to emerge, taking on the classic form of the quest myth, which is the form I tend to work in, and the idea developed of the character from outside who would penetrate it. He'd be mysteriously chosen and at the same time manipulated—and I wanted the story to be told in the form of a mystery, with clues and riddles which unfold, the

truth slowly peeled away. As soon as I hit on the idea of the mythical hero character, the innocent who finds knowledge, the Arthur-Merlin relationship came quite easily. And I think that all the time I had spent on preparing *Lord of the Rings* began to have its effect; I'm much more familiar with Tolkien than I am with science fiction.

**What led you to give up the *Lord of the Rings* project?**

The cost, for one thing. It would have been prohibitively expensive. But there was something else: the more I worked on the Tolkien, the more it diminished—in the end, Tolkien always really avoids the big issues. But it was a fascinating project while it lasted. He uses all the myths, including Merlin in the form of Gandalf, my favourite character.

**So you put Merlin into *Zardoz* instead?**

The figure of Merlin is so strong that he survives all reinterpretations. I think what intrigues me about him is the antichrist aspect. Merlin arose when Christianity was trying to get a foothold in England, and he was said to have been born of a virgin by the Devil. It was because of the purity of his mother that he was both good and evil; the two extremes were always at war in him. He had this great practical quality, he was a tremendous politician, a king-maker, and whereas everybody else was living in this fantasy land of high ideals he really knew what it was all about. The other thing about

Merlin is that he recognised he was unable to achieve anything himself, he could only do it through other people. I'm always skirting round the story; it's fascinating because the Grail legend contains all the Jungian archetypes, and it's elusive, it occurs in so many forms, the only really consistent thing about it is the power of the characters. In the Christian version, the seeker for the Grail has to be sexually pure, whereas in the pagan version he had to achieve his knowledge carnally. He learned from a series of women, which allowed him to find the Grail. And that's the way it happens in *Zardoz*.

**Arthur Frayn, your Merlin character in *Zardoz*, is an extremely bizarre figure, with his painted beard and pantomime clothes. Why did you make him so clownish?**

I wanted to suggest him as a prankster, slightly crazy. And it was an idea that I never really got out enough in the film, that when the Eternals are rebuilt they're not exactly as they were before. One of them, George Saden, mentions it during his trial. He pleads mitigation because he says he was 'imperfectly repaired, and these things leak out through the head wound of my third death.' I wanted this idea that the Tabernacle, a kind of super-computer, which receives all their memories and experiences constantly, could rebuild them physically and mentally if they were killed—but that in being rebuilt there's something slightly



missing each time, the plan would be fading, and this slight craziness would emerge.

Frayn was a result of that, and he would certainly have become Renegade very quickly except for the fact that he kept out of the way, being a kind of colonial administrator; he kept away from the Vortex as much as possible and they were happy to let him do it. The colonial powers are always happier to let someone go off and be out there looking after them all, and the less you know the better.

**Why does Frayn have a shrine to Zardoz in his room? Surely he wouldn't worship a god he'd created himself?**

Frayn's house is full of conjuring tricks and bits and pieces, and it was his sort of irony that was at work. He'd prepared this place for Zed, or someone like him, and he was going to bring him here and show what he'd prepared by pulling back the curtain. There are several clues to the film in that room, by the way. In the background there's a reproduction of the Magritte picture which inspired the Head, the picture of a huge boulder in the sky—I just stuck it there because it was one of the sources for the idea of the flying stone Head.

**Another being *The Wizard of Oz*...**

Yes, the Head actually started off looking like the mask from the *Wizard of Oz* film, but stylistically it was too naive. So then I based it on Blake's drawing, because Blake's kind of fantasy is something very close to me. That kind of nightmare world is something I find sympathy with. But the Head kept on changing, you know, because I had a modeller who was making it and it rather alarmingly became more and more to look like me. I used to go down and tell him each day what I wanted, I want more of this kind of look, and I'd show my teeth and he'd say great, just hold that for a minute...

**The special effects with the flying Head are strikingly good. In fact the photography throughout is remarkable, but quite different in style from your previous work.**

I've never worked with the same cameraman twice, partly because I've worked in different countries, but also because I'm a great believer in casting cameramen. With *Zardoz* I wanted a diffused, rather gentle light, nothing like the savage effects in *Deliverance*, and Geoffrey Unsworth, whom I've admired for years (he's done everything from *Cabaret* to 2001), has an incredible ability, he can deal with anything. In planning *Zardoz*, we agreed to use fog-filters to cut down the harsh tones, but we went a step further because we felt that filters are one-dimensional, they're a flat thing between audience and image, so we actually used smoke throughout the film.

Smoke provided a three-dimensional diffusion of light, not just as it entered the camera but as it struck the objects on the set, and I think the effect for an audience is to make it misty and mysterious, a dream-like world you can't quite get hold of. But we also used a lot of glass, which curiously enough can have the opposite effect if you're not careful. Geoffrey told me that when they made *A Night to Remember*, about the 'Titanic', they built one half of the ship and then shot it through a mirror when they needed the other half. It was a strange thing, but all the shots in the mirror looked better than the shots that were straight on.

For Zed's struggle with the crystal we built a mirror-maze, about seventy feet across, with mirrors everywhere set at angles to each other; and the interesting thing is that everybody who worked inside it found it unbearable after a while. We all went mad. We couldn't tell what was real any more. As for the shots of the Head, I'm very pleased with those; with only one exception, they were all done in the negative, there are no process shots at all. The secret is that we used different sizes of Head according to the shot and the perspective, and from time to time we used differential focus—the big giveaway is always the focus. Where the Head lands for the first time I used bits of full-size sections, and by cutting all these things together, hopefully there's the illusion that you've actually seen the thing arriving.

**Why does Arthur Frayn adopt the murderous policy of feeding guns to the Exterminators?**

His relationship with the Outlands (actually they're the Wasteland of the Grail legend, of course; but I didn't want to be too obvious in calling them that) is developed in three stages. The Vortex was first formed after the world had collapsed in some way that I don't specify except to suggest that everything is poisoned, sour. The vast majority of people are destroyed and the remainder become primitive bands roaming the Earth, managing to survive the poisons. In time, they begin to multiply and the spectre of over-population arises again, so the Eternals have to do something about it. So Frayn devises the idea of a godhead which controls them. The simple way to control primitive people is always to devise a religion.

So the first stage is this practical thing about keeping down the numbers. And the second phase is where the Eternals are dedicated to doing everything for themselves, growing their own food and living in harmony sharing the chores and so on. But because of the numbers who fall into apathy and others who become Renegades, they reach a point at which they can't feed themselves and they fall back on the device of getting the Exterminators to enslave Brutals to grow grain. And that's the beginning of the colonialism that's their downfall. Once people become dependent on a slave labour force they are doomed because of that dependence, because decadence inevitably sets in. Then the third phase comes when Frayn sees these people mutated by whatever disaster has occurred, and he gets the idea of selective breeding in order to produce one far better than any others; which of course is something he can do over the generations because he's immortal.

**And Zed is the result, hiding in a grain shipment to confront his 'creator'. Why, when he emerges gun uppermost, do you film him in slow motion?**

Well, I ended *Deliverance* with a hand coming out of the water, so I thought I might as well start this one with a hand coming out of the grain... But at the same time it's an image which is both nightmarish and threatening, the sense of being buried alive combining with this image of something coming out of liquid. It suggests the hidden force of nature thrusting



Sean Connery: Zed's slow motion emergence from the grain shipment

up from underneath, and it's something very powerful to me. I mean, it said so much of what I wanted to say. The film is about today, about contemporary society, and all the characters, the Brutals, the Exterminators, the Eternals, the Renegades and the Apathetics, are aspects of the human condition—they're all tendencies that we have in each of us, taken to extreme forms. And in this kind of parable, with its master-slave relationships, its rich and poor, I wanted to show that this parable of the force of nature coming to the surface derived a tremendous strength from being linked with the basic theme of grain and food. I think that the slow motion makes it more emphatic—it wouldn't have the same heroic quality if it were done at normal speed, with the grain just falling off him. It needs to flow.

**Why do you have Zed shoot straight at the audience when he first appears?**

It's interesting that when you make a film for an American distributor, someone from their television department sends you a list of comments on things which are not acceptable on television. I was delighted to find that one of the things you are not permitted on American television is to have a gun firing at the audience. So why did I do it? Well, it's obviously a very important thing. I started with Zardoz coming down and spewing out all these guns, and I wanted to play on every kind of religious idiom I could think of—Jehovah the God of Wrath calling for a sacrifice, the phallic nature of the gun, everything working on the audience's susceptibilities. And then when the idea of these Exterminators is established, the James Bond myth figure picks up the gun and here he is in another kind of myth, and he shoots because I wanted to say that the audience is not exempt from the killings, this is directed at you.

In a literal sense, it identifies the audience as Brutals, but in a symbolic sense it's saying, you know, this film is going to kill you... It links up with the scene at the end where they age and die, again looking



straight at the audience while this thing happens, which is another kind of death. And of course Connery is necessary as an introduction to this future world because he seems to be simpler, and the things we don't understand we see that he doesn't understand either, so he helps us along.

**I was never sure how much Zed did know.**

This is one of the problems, in that Zed is concealing from them (and therefore from us) what his true position is; his life unfolds in flashback through his memories. And these help us to contrast the two ways of life. As well as commenting on society and where it is leading, the other element that I wanted in the film is that here are the objectives we uphold, such as longevity, harmony, absolute democracy, freedom from disease and so on, but are they necessarily any good?

The Eternals have achieved a kind of collective consciousness (called the 'second level'); they're able as scientists to do intensive research. The object of their community is first to preserve the knowledge of the past against this Dark Age which has fallen, and secondly to try to solve the problems that have beset humanity for so long. The weakness is that they find they're not really able to do it. We always feel we'll get there eventually, you know, there are plenty of brilliant people around and bang, we'll make it. I'm saying we won't. I'm saying we're hopelessly ill-equipped, and there's no real hope for human beings in their present form of achieving anything meaningful. The Vortex is a community dedicated to these ends, but at the point when Zed arrives even the most avid upholders of the system, such as Consuella, are beginning to have their beliefs eroded. As Avalow says, when they ask where he came from, 'We've conjured him up.' They needed him at that point. And it refers back to Arthur Frayn's conjuring tricks, as well as to the Frankenstein legend—the way he has produced and invented this creature, and the way he comes into society and horrifies them.

**Yet he totally absorbs all aspects of that society with the help of the three women—May, Avalow, and finally Consuella.**

You have in those three women three aspects of womanhood. Avalow (her name is derived from Avalon, the Celtic name for the rendezvous of the dead) is the pure mystic, the pure virgin prophetess that you find in myths. She helps him to see, she's desirable yet untouchable. May is a kind of earth mother in the guise of knowledge, the repository of nature, and her instinct and aim is for a new generation, not for herself. Consuella is his logical partner, she recognises that they belong together, because she is the one who has opposed him, and leads the attack on him. 'In hunting you,' she says, 'I've become you.' But Zed has achieved his task and in doing so has broken himself; he knows too much to be able to function. So just as Goethe, finally, married a simple girl and lived a simple life, that's as much as Zed can do now that his life is over, in a sense.

It's a classic situation in that the myth hero, in achieving his objective, always destroys what he was, and he ends up burnt out. He has become a more complex person, and a complex person is always

weaker than a simple person. So Zed returns to the natural cycle, and what I tried to achieve in that scene at the end is that Connery is looking straight at the audience and he offers a challenge. They have been released from the sterility of individual immortality into the mystery and, perhaps, hope of the regeneration of the human race, possibly to new solutions. In my story, evolution comes forward, takes a hand, and things move on. The *impasse* in *Zardoz* is perhaps the kind that we've reached already, and in all the predictions about the future of the human race there always seems to be a factor left out—the question of what evolution might do. It might even damage more than it creates. Anyway, it's all speculation, it's all fun. . .

**As with *Leo the Last*, you have set out the contrast between an earthy, vital society, and a sterile, inactive one.**

It's rather infuriating to me that I always try to do something totally different, to get away from anything I've done before, and when I've finished, I look back and think 'Christ! I've done the same old story again.' Well, like *Leo* it deals with the weaknesses and aspirations of human society, and I think that the Marxists are as angered by it as the Conservatives, which is a good sign. And the Women's Lib people think it's saying that male virility is the only answer, which is a bit of misreading because after all the women are the dominant people in the film. Somebody said to me that what it comes down to in the end is that Zed has to bang some sense into these women, which is the exact opposite to what happens because actually they bang sense into him, don't they? In the scene where they give him their knowledge, they are the sexual aggressors and he's totally passive.

**Another theme in the film is your concern with old age?**

I wanted to take this idea of everyone having achieved eternal youth, the thing our society seems to worship most of all, and to show that the punishment, the worst thing that can happen in this future society, is to

be inflicted with old age. Just as in our society, you're reviled if you become old. I did everything to make those old people nasty; they're selfish and spiteful and malicious. Yet when I was shooting it—and when you look at it—they turn out to be the most likeable, human characters. Possibly it's because they're easy to identify with, they share our petty vices, they're closer to us than the other characters. It was the same thing with the bath scene in *Leo the Last*. That was supposed to be grotesque, but film seems to change in your hands and it came out quite differently, with a feeling of compassion. And of course the old come into their own at the end in *Zardoz*, living a kind of carnival life, dancing eternally in this seedy ballroom.

The other thing I was anxious to get in is this sense of the planet itself, of Nature having this kind of malignant intelligence which is also malicious. One of the tricks at the end is when the old scientist (who's played, by the way, by Sybil Thorndike's son, Christopher Casson—there's a bit of immortality for you!) points out that the Vortex is an offence against nature, and it had to produce Zed in order to break it, so that they forced the hand of evolution. When Frayn claims the credit for everything, Zed says: 'But I've looked into the face of the force that put the idea in your mind.'

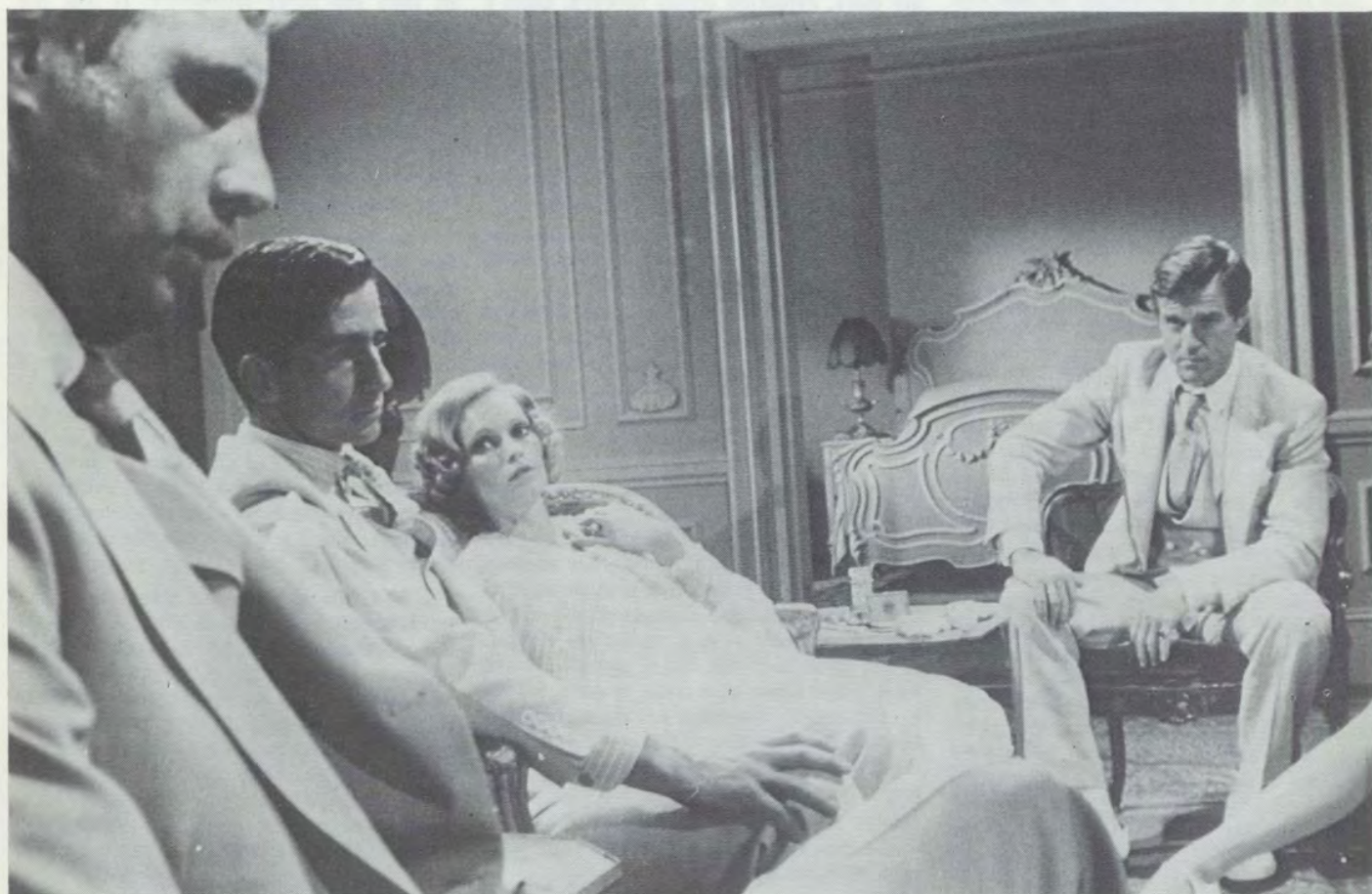
I had this idea of the planet being an intelligence, but which couldn't express its consciousness except by working away on its crust by developing things like plants and people. What a fantastic way of making things happen—just by popping ideas into people's minds! Actually, that's what films do, I suppose. Both *Zardoz* and *Leo* are expressionist films and they're closest to me, really. I'm interested in what a film can contain. Most films are just surfaces; film isn't explored enough, particularly in terms of ideas. People are afraid of putting ideas into films, as though for some reason that's not the place for them. Maybe evolution will do something about that as well, some day. . .

*Sean Connery in the maze of mirrors*





# GATSBY



**Penelope Houston**

*Bruce Dern, Sam Waterston, Mia Farrow, Robert Redford*

Ironies in the film business strike hard and often. At a time when the British production industry is wondering how to survive its crippling shortage of investment capital, it seems a rather splendid incongruity (at least keeping some technicians in work) that one of the year's major American movies not only boasts a British director but has also been made very largely in a British studio. *The Great Gatsby* crossed the Atlantic 'for totally economic reasons', says Jack Clayton. If the film had kept to its original time-table, with shooting starting in the summer of 1972, the unit would probably have stayed put in America. But the withdrawal of Ali MacGraw, her replacement as Daisy by Mia Farrow, and the year's delay before the production got under way, brought changes. They shot the parties and the exteriors of the Long Island mansions in Newport, Rhode Island (the book's high summer, says Clayton, all too often reproduced in dripping rain); they filmed for a few days on location in New York; and then they shipped the rest to Pinewood, building the Valley of Ashes on the back lot (see SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1973).

Scott Fitzgerald, as a connoisseur of the ways of studios, might have enjoyed one small circumstance. Last summer, the

*Gatsby* swimming-pool was a striking addition to Pinewood's amenities. Cool, elegant and airy, pavilioned in a splendour of plate-glass mirrors and signs of the zodiac, it was an expensive affair to build; and the studio were asked if they would like to meet a share of the cost for constructing something more permanent and have the pool to keep. The offer was turned down. And in lashing January rain, all that was left was a large, leaf-strewn and extremely muddy hole in the ground. *Sunset Boulevard* seemed to have taken over; one half expected to see a rat picking its way among the puddles.

Jack Clayton had by January reached the dubbing stage, with an end of March opening date to meet in America, and a mid-April date here. His active involvement began in the autumn of 1971, though his interest goes a long way further back. 'I first read the book when I was fifteen, and I read it at about the same time as another American novel that I was also insane about—*They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*. I always wanted to do them both as pictures. I nearly did do *They Shoot Horses*, and then actually did this one.' He fields diplomatically any question about letting an English director loose on one of the quintessential

expressions of American temperament. Didn't any Americans—including perhaps his own scriptwriter, Francis Ford Coppola—regret that they had let the big one get away? 'I wouldn't feel qualified to do a story set in the Bronx, let's say. But apart from the romantic side of the film, and *Gatsby's* obsession (and I think I understand obsession quite well), it is a story about class. Which is something I love. Didn't Marx say that there are differences between classes but basically very little difference between nationalities—between the English rich and the American rich?' Scott Fitzgerald of course said it too: the rich are different from us.

Clayton worked on the script with Coppola, who came in when Truman Capote had to drop out, and did 'a miraculously quick job'. It was Coppola's version that was laid on for shooting back in 1972; but Clayton spent some of the year of delay in further revisions. The major problem must of course be *Gatsby* himself, seen in the novel through the class-conscious, often censorious, sometimes wondering eyes of Nick Carraway (Sam Waterston), but on the screen necessarily stripped of the protective narrative shield. 'The most difficult part for an actor to play of almost any that I can think of,' says



Clayton; adding that he chose Robert Redford for the possibility of danger underlying 'the WASP image'.

'In Fitzgerald's letters to his publisher, he said that he wrote Gatsby first as a much older man, modelled of course on someone he knew. And then, as so often happens with Fitzgerald, he floated off that and made a kind of Fitzgerald character out of him. So that he was never really a one person character. And there are other difficulties. Gatsby is constantly described as very laconic, and it's this descriptive impression that you take away from the book. But in fact, in the dialogue, he is almost unbelievably verbose. The famous car ride, for instance, where he talks about himself—"I am the son of wealthy people in the Middle West . . . I lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe." There are a whole series of statements there; and although Fitzgerald was of course using them for a purpose, they still make Gatsby out a very chatty person. So you have to reconcile the Gatsby of the dialogue with the Gatsby of the descriptive passages.' (One is reminded that Fitzgerald, equally aware of how Gatsby had been patched together, once considered making Tom Buchanan the novel's dominant character.)

The script includes one key addition: 'A totally new sequence, which is not in the book, which I consider is really cheated in the book, and perfectly justifiable to do in the film. In the novel, the only mention of any relationship between Daisy and Gatsby after they meet again comes in a single sentence, when he tells Nick that he has fired the servants because "Daisy comes over quite often in the afternoons." You never have anything other than that, and it's very smart to do it like that in a book. But for the film I would personally count it as a cheat. I think you have to see it. The sequence is also the method of finding out about the past, the past between them, without using flashback.'

Purists need not necessarily fall about in a rage. Fitzgerald wrote to Edmund Wilson in 1925 about *Gatsby*: 'The worst fault in it, I think is a *big fault*. I gave no account of (and had no feeling about or knowledge of) the emotional relations between Gatsby and Daisy from the time of their reunion to the catastrophe. However, the lack is so astutely concealed by the retrospect of Gatsby's past and by blankets of excellent prose that no one has noticed it—though everyone has felt the lack and called it by another name . . . I felt that what he [Mencken] really missed was the lack of any emotional backbone at the very height of it.' Fitzgerald's core of coolness when looking at his own work is the other side of the temperament that could write to Gertrude Stein that, 'like Gatsby, I have only hope.'

The script also changes the scene of the first meeting between Gatsby and Daisy, over the flustered tea served by the 'demoniac Finn' in Nick's cottage. 'That scene is straight out of English drawing-room farce. And I can't believe that someone who has had Gatsby's background in life, who is in fact a very, very tough person, would suddenly revert to behaving like a gauche and ridiculous 17-year-old.' (Wasn't there, I suggest, a surviving 17-year-old in Fitzgerald himself and consequently in all his heroes? Yes, says Clayton, but still how do

you make it work on screen?) He has himself added a detail near the end, after the double tragedy in which Myrtle Wilson is run down and killed, and her husband shoots Gatsby and then himself. 'In the book, Wilson's death and Myrtle's death seem to me enormously thrown away. I wanted to bring back to the audience a sense of the tragedy of all of them—because Myrtle is innocent and Wilson is innocent. So when Gatsby's father comes to the funeral, he and Nick in fact drive through the Valley of Ashes and Nick sees Katherine, Myrtle's sister, coming out of the house and throwing away some junk. And the father meanwhile is talking about Gatsby's boyhood. The point is that I'm equally concerned with what happens to Myrtle and Wilson. I love all the characters; and that's something very necessary for me as a director, and perhaps necessary for most people.'

Clayton has found himself being less tender to one minor but celebrated character. The owl-eyed man duly turns up at Gatsby's funeral, the solitary mourner from the great parties, to speak the epitaph—'the poor son of a bitch'—that Dorothy Parker was to use years later after Fitzgerald's own death. Tom Ewell plays him, and Clayton shot the two earlier scenes in which Nick first encounters the owl-eyed man in the rich drunkenness of the party. But in the final cut both scenes have been regrettably jettisoned. 'It was not pressure. That's usually the reason given, and people make excuses. I make no excuses. But we do not have a short picture, and simply for reasons of flow and time I had to remove the scenes . . . I'm not exactly a comedy director, but the scene with the owl-eyed man in the car when the wheel comes off was a beautifully done and funny thing because the actors were so terrific. But it's virtually the only scene where none of the principals is present, and for that reason on the screen it's like coming up against a brick wall. The story stops, and you're asking yourself what the scene is really about.'

The funeral itself was shot at a cemetery in North London and in the studio, with special gravestones in what is apparently a distinctive American style, recently described by Philip Toynbee as looking 'gross, squat and infinitely sinister.' I ask Clayton if he doesn't feel that, however finicky and meticulous the concern about props, a location still gives away its nationality

simply by some quality of light. But he insists that its transatlantic journey hasn't affected the movie at all, and even counters with one minuscule gain. Apparently the Eastern seaboard 'Gold Coast' (Long Island, etc.) was then celebrated for its elm trees, long since destroyed by elm disease. 'We have elms in our drives,' Clayton says.

Has he, I ask, used narration at the end, or found some other way of conveying the novel's spectacular and complex dying fall, its moral centre, the sense of regret and the capacity for wonder in those last few marvellous sentences? 'We have gone back to Gatsby's house at the end, in fact with a piece of narration, but not the great last few sentences because I think they are too complicated in many ways for the screen. But the very last thing, the last section of the book, I've tried to do in a strange way through the very last shot of the film, which has the final credit titles over it. You see Daisy and Tom coming from a great yacht along a long, long causeway, followed by people. As though everyone has forgotten Gatsby and all that life goes on again.'

Clayton has come to *Gatsby* after a long pause since *Our Mother's House* in 1967. Two projects on which he spent a lot of time—*The Looking Glass War*, John Le Carré's novel about seedily ageing secret agents still living in the past of World War II, and *Casualties of War*, Daniel Lang's account of an American army patrol, morally lost in Vietnam—would both have been on the face of it distinctly anti-romantic. *Gatsby* may not be that elusive creature the Great American Novel, but it preserves marvellously intact, across half a century, the romantic readiness of the great American dream—the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty.'

I remember talking to Clayton shortly after *Room at the Top*, when he reacted with notable asperity to suggestions that his film could be slotted tidily into a general move towards what could then be defined as British realism. His later pictures obviously proved his point. Now, with another of those nudging ironies, Clayton's new film looks like being placed in the forefront of a move—already rolling along with a heavy build-up of publicity weight behind it—to bring romanticism back to the American screen. His reaction, though milder, is still much the same. 'It all happens by chance. There is no pattern to my pattern. It's not at all calculated; I wish it were . . .'

'The Great Gatsby': Jordan Baker on the golf-course







Overseas action: Richard Lester filming 'The Three Musketeers'

John Russell Taylor

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE UNENGLISHNESS OF ENGLISH FILMS

# TOMORROW THE WORLD

To teach a course in the history of British cinema to American students is to be reminded constantly of its unending precariousness. Also of the mystery of its Britishness. After all, it started having crises in the 1900s—the books proudly tabulate them—and began the pursuit of foreign markets and/or foreign investment shortly thereafter. Of course one has a vague image of indigenous cinema, but try to pin it down and what does it come to? In the Thirties, I suppose, to some comedies and musicals—not much export for Will Hay and George Formby, or even for Gracie Fields, but even Jessie Matthews and Hitchcock were not entirely for home consumption. Still, one can set Michael Balcon against the international approach of Korda—even though it was Balcon who headed first the most substantial attempt to bring American money into British films in the pre-war years with the MGM programme which produced *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, *A Yank at Oxford* and *The Citadel*. Even in those days, it would seem, the people most interested in the Britishness of British films were by no means averse (and why should they be?) to using American money to finance the notion.

Indeed it is possible, oversimplifying a little but not really that much, to see the whole history of the British cinema in terms of its fluctuating relations with America and the American market. Even in silent days foreign films, particularly American, were the menace from which the home product supposedly had to be protected—hence the various quota acts with their results good and bad. Possibly one of the worst things that ever happened to British films was the surprise success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, which was the most important single factor in concentrating Korda's mind on the international super-production. Thereby hung a string of disasters—though undeniably among them some surprisingly durable films—and the haunting suspicion that the answer for the problems of the British cinema would be to break into the American market, be accepted on a par with the Hollywood product, if only the way to do this could be found.

The war was a strange interlude in all this. Not for nothing do so many people nowadays look back on it as the golden age of British films. For once the industry and its audience were in tune, and well matched. The universality of the picture-going habit helped all films, but the intensified sense of beleaguered national identity made going to British films patriotic as well as pleasurable, and helped, on the other side, to produce a particular intensity of response in the film-makers themselves. And the amount of assistance, direct and indirect, provided by a government highly conscious of the propaganda value of a lively national cinema was not to be sneezed at either. So for once the idea of British films for British audiences was not only a possibility; it was a necessity.

Peace, of course, brought problems. Again, American markets seemed within reach, glittering prospects opened up and, notoriously, *Caesar and Cleopatra* and



Karel Reisz in America for 'The Gambler', with Lauren Hutton



London Town were elaborated at vast expense to invade the Americas. All to no avail (though Balcon's Ealing continued, well into the 1950s, to demonstrate the advantages of being British); and by 1948 an over-extended industry was stumbling into another crisis. Since when, through several more crises, the American end of the business has been crucial. Would Americans invest in British films? Sometimes yes, sometimes no, and anyway, it depends what you mean by a British film. *Odd Man Out* may be a British film, but how about *The Third Man*? What about the metamorphosis of *Gone to Earth* into *The Wild Heart*? And who can forget the strange transformation of Alan Ladd into a 'Canadian' paratrooper or Irene Dunne into Queen Victoria? It was, after all, always conceivable that he who paid the piper might wish to call the tune, and it was hard to think too badly of him if he did.

Anyway, no one had to take American money. Or did they? The whole boring and irrelevant question of the propriety of lending oneself to the 'Americanisation' of the British cinema has by now been chewed over so exhaustively and exhaustingly that there is little point in going further into it. In an art which requires such a sizable investment in its production, obviously artists are going to take the money from wherever they can get it. More interesting by far is the implication behind the questions of morality which are raised. Many people—critics and commentators, film-makers, politicians with an interest in the arts—seem to accept without question that there is some special virtue in the preservation and continuance of a specifically British cinema. Practically speaking, this is obvious: there are studios to be kept open, actors and technicians are out of work, and a potentially valuable source of income from foreign countries will be cut off. But that is not all that is meant. A higher good of some kind is suggested to reside in Englishness (or at least Britishness) as an isolable, recognisable quality. Moreover, it seems to be assumed that it is the duty of British film-makers to exemplify this quality at all times, or, if they are not able through force majeure (and are not strong enough to choose the way of national purity and silence) to do so all the time, at least they are supposed to be worried about their failure, and contrite, and eager to make up for their lapses by doing better and more British next time.

All of which, put thus baldly, sounds strange and suspect. Of course, it never is put thus baldly, and no doubt many who seem to accept it as unspoken assumption would be horrified to be told that that is what they really mean. Yet how else can one explain the often bitter criticisms levelled at the heads of film-makers who make international-type (even if British based) films, or the way the British press often seem to be pushing British stars, directors, writers who are working successfully abroad to admit that they are not happy, not satisfied, and long to return to the land of their birth and mix with their kind again? Some sort of buried but still potent chauvinism appears to be working away. Otherwise, why does no one here think it peculiar or psychologically crippling that Henry James or T. S. Eliot (or Joseph Losey or Richard Lester) should choose to



John Schlesinger: a break during shooting on 'The Day of the Locust'

become English, or for that matter that the Hungarian Kordas or the Italian Filippo Del Giudice or the Russian Anatole De Grunwald should have become such vital forces in British film-making?

These considerations, which might seem academic or historical merely, have come to a new relevance of late because of the virtual disappearance from production of British films with much degree of ambition. The result has been a sudden 'brain-drain' of British film-making talent to foreign parts, with attendant recrimination and breast-beating. But even to put it that way involves a number of dubious assumptions. To begin with: post hoc, propter hoc. A moment's reflection disposes of that one. True enough that, for instance, John Schlesinger, Karel Reisz, Mike Hodges, Peter Yates (and for that matter Michael Winner) have been making films in America, while Anthony Harvey, Jack Clayton and Tony Richardson have been making 'American' films (i.e., set in America and with largely American casts) in Britain. But that is not exactly a new development. Though all the directors mentioned are British in nationality and training, they have nearly all been flirting with American, or at least international, production for years, the extreme instance being Anthony Harvey, a British director who has never really made what you could call a British film.

In fact, the only difference between the situation now and that when, say, Peter Yates moved from *Robbery* in Britain to *Bullitt* in California, or John Boorman went from *Catch Us If You Can* to *Point Blank*, is that today there does not seem to be much alternative. Outside of a James Bond film or a Hammer horror or something of the sort, what kind of British film could a British director of the standing we are talking about hope to make? Not, surely, *Carry On Up the Buses*? It is notable, and hardly accidental, that of three projects John Schlesinger is known to have been interested in during the time since *Sunday, Bloody*

*Sunday* it is only the American one, *The Day of the Locust*, which has got off the ground, while the two British ones, *Hadrian VII* and *A Handful of Dust*, have been put aside; if, we may hope, only for the moment. Schlesinger, at least, volunteers that he has some feeling of distress about this: 'I have got used to regarding myself as mid-Atlantic, but I am English, I do like to work in England, and particularly with English actors. It's very upsetting that the only way I can keep at least one foot on English soil is to work in the theatre, and that's one reason I'm going back to do *Heartbreak House* at the National in July.'

The reason for this, in Schlesinger's experience, is that for the time being 'British films' are regarded as box-office poison. The idea is no doubt just as arbitrary as the idea that the salvation of the industry lies in big-budget pictures or small-budget pictures or pictures about nuns or pictures about rats—all of which have been proposed as panaceas in the not too distant past. But arbitrary or not, it is an idea a lot of producers are working on. In support of it they point out that *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, *O Lucky Man!* and most other British pictures of more than minimal budget have lost money in the last few years, the obvious exception being *Clockwork Orange*. And that doesn't count because it was made by an American and anyway is a sort of science fiction. What do they mean, exactly, by a 'British film'? Anything made in Britain, with British actors, accurately reflecting a contemporary British scene. This would seem to leave us with an American-backed British cinema consisting of costume pictures (*Lady Caroline Lamb*) or science fiction (*Zardoz*). But even projects along these lines somehow tend to get tarred with the same brush. Undoubtedly, if *Clockwork Orange* were in prospect now, and if anyone but Kubrick, with 2001 under his belt, were wanting to make it, it would be turned down like the rest.

And yet, paradoxically, British directors, technicians and actors have never been





'A Delicate Balance': Tony Richardson with Katharine Hepburn, Joseph Cotten, Betsy Blair

hotter properties on the international market than now. In Hollywood terms they seem to congregate particularly around Paramount, two of whose biggest current productions, *The Day of the Locust* and *The Great Gatsby*, as well as the more modest *The Gambler* and whatever Peter Yates is now engaged on, are in the hands of Britishers. This appears to be coincidence, having more to do with the present standing of Paramount as the most active of the major studios, with more of everything going on than anybody else. But it is a sign of the times. And how do the directors concerned feel about it? Predictably, and reasonably, they start by being happy that they are making films at all. Then, they disclaim any feeling that they are or should be limited to narrowly British subjects made within the confines of a narrowly British cinema. They are not some special kind of animal, a British film-maker; they are film-makers *tout court*, making films wherever they can, or wherever a subject that appeals to them turns up.

Karel Reisz, for instance, fresh from making his first completely American film, *The Gambler* (no connection with Dostoevsky), in New York and Las Vegas, sees a clear line of continuity in his own work, but it is not a continuity of Britishness. 'It's easier for me to say that because I'm not British anyway, and it was largely accident that I ended up in Britain and therefore began making British films. But essentially I always make the same film, wherever and however I'm working. All my films—*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Night Must Fall*, *Morgan*, *Isadora*—are about a central character who is in some way on the edge of sanity, seen partly from his or her own point of view, partly, none too sympathetically, from the outside. It's obsessive, so that it turns out that way even when, as in *Night Must Fall*, the subject was not initially my own choice. The new film is inevitably on the same old subject: it's an original screenplay; the writer brought it to me, I liked it

and we did it. It really doesn't make the slightest difference whether it was made here, in America or on the moon.'

I suggest there may be a touch of special pleading here: even if Reisz, for perfectly reasonable reasons, feels little sense of national identity, what about some of the other British film-makers? Has there not been an appreciable shift from Free Cinema days, a change in everybody's feeling about the matter of Britain as a necessary subject for film-making? 'Not at all. The shift has been one of circumstances. I think we are all international film-makers. John Schlesinger is; Tony Richardson is; Lindsay is. And always have been. *This Sporting Life* isn't a narrowly British film; it is an international film that happens in this instance to be made in Britain. If we all started on small-scale, realistic-seeming subjects like *Saturday Night* or *A Kind of Loving* or Tony Richardson's *Osborne* films, it was for severely practical reasons. At that time we were beginners, and it was much easier to get one's hands on a couple of hundred thousand pounds than it was on a couple of million dollars to make a film. The degree of success one achieves in one's career simply gives one more freedom to make the films one wants to in the way one wants to. I don't believe any of us feel that we are betraying anything by making larger-scale, "international" productions, because our beginnings were not made on any national, let alone nationalistic, principle.'

I can accept consistency to inner vision, but I baulk a little at the inclusion of Lindsay Anderson in a list of film-makers whose nationality is largely incidental to their work and creative personality. Surely he is an 'international figure' only in the sense that his intensity of vision and dazzling gifts of self-expression make materials which are very closely tied up with the British way of life and the British scene universally accessible? Karel Reisz does not agree: after all, he says, one of Anderson's most successful theatre productions was Max

Frisch's *The Fire-Raisers*, which is about bourgeois Swiss. One might, of course, reply that the Swiss are English, only more so. But that is not quite what I am talking about. No one is saying—or I certainly am not—that British directors should be herded like indentured labourers into a compound marked 'British cinema' and never allowed to leave. Of course the reason they are in such demand internationally is because their technical and imaginative capabilities are generally accepted as being at least on a par with those of their American colleagues. Also, as Karel Reisz cannily remarks, most American directors of similar standing have become so expensive that American producers are afraid to confide already big productions to them. 'Not that we could express what we have to say any more within five-week schedules and the minimal budgets we used to have. But we are still likely to be quicker and cheaper than many Americans.'

The question is rather, to my mind, is there anything one could isolate as a specifically British quality which can operate at maximum intensity not only in films about Britain, but also, perhaps all the more perceptibly, in films which call upon directors to respond to a foreign scene? It seems to me, for instance—perhaps naively—that some of the special intensity and excitement of *Midnight Cowboy* or *Point Blank* or *Bullitt*, or even, much though one may say against it, *The Loved One*, or further back still *The Sweet Smell of Success*, resides in precisely this quality of being a non-American view of America, with the director functioning, among many other things, as a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, excited by frequently mundane things which an American would take for granted. Has not a lot of Hollywood's success in showing the American scene come from permutations on this formula, setting foreigners from Stroheim to Milos Forman loose on America to respond in their own way? I could readily imagine Lindsay Anderson making a film about America, and doing a very exciting job; but I suspect that it would, in this sense at least, show him at his most intransigently British, and that would be what gave it its special quality.

Karel Reisz does not agree, or at any rate feels I am sentimentalising something which is readily explicable in other ways. 'The difference between *Robbery* and *Bullitt*, or between *Billy Liar* and *Midnight Cowboy*, is almost entirely one of resources. More money—there is a strict limit on what you can do with a British budget. And more importantly, the superlative technical back-up. In America you are working with some of the best technicians in the world, and within a whole film-making machine that makes most British film-making look like a cottage industry. And the scripts—no scriptwriters are better than Americans at really tight, functional construction jobs. In Britain all too often you go on the floor with half a script and improvise. That seldom happens in America. Naturally in the circumstances almost any director looks better.' However, I extract from him what sounds like the beginning of some sort of meaningful distinction when he remarks, listing the British directors now working for Paramount, that there is Peter Yates, but he doesn't really count because he has become



an American director. What does he mean by that? Is there a difference between making films in America and becoming an American director?

'I suppose I mean principally that he has moved his base of operations to America, that he lives in New York and makes only American films. But I would have to say also that even in *Robbery* he seems to me to have the makings of a specifically American kind of director. You see, he is really interested in narrative, in telling a story. I think most classic American cinema is based on that, and that is what Hollywood has always been geared to. It is perhaps a European quality, if not a specifically British one, that we are not really interested in narrative. I'm not, I know. I've turned down dozens of perfectly good, workable scripts through the years because they are story-telling and I doubt my ability to function in that way. We are more interested in character development, in atmosphere, in creeping up obliquely on our subjects. We seldom choose to express ourselves through narrative as such. If there is a distinction, I suppose that is it. But even so, you could see that if you like as a continuing European contribution to American cinema rather than something essentially non-American.'

Fair enough. But I keep coming back in my mind to my experience teaching American students a course in British cinema. Naturally they hope, during the course, to isolate some quality or qualities which are distinctively British. The language is not enough of a distinction, even if they still have so much difficulty understanding the dialogue of *A Hard Day's Night* that they need subtitles. But what else is there? Up to a certain point I feel fairly confident of being able to point it out. The point, I should say, comes somewhere in the mid-Sixties. Swinging London, though invented by *Time* magazine, did actually correspond to something that was happening in England at that time; it was, shall we say, a cunning merchandising job done on something which really existed, rather than a complete fabrication. And there is a

certain coherence of feeling and response, linking the good (*The Knack*) with the middling (*Alfie*) with the terrible (*Up the Junction*). But other films of the same period seem to be drifting away—for better or worse. *Darling* is an international film, of no fixed abode, and the new men are already moving westward: *Point Blank* dates from 1967 and *Bullitt* from 1968. Tony Harvey's 'British' directorial debut, *Dutchman* (1967), has an American cast and is set entirely on the New York subway, and the fact that it was made by a British director in a British studio seems no more than a freakish accident.

Of course there are still films being made which reflect the British scene and seem vitally connected with observation of the British way of life, the most spectacular success among them Lindsay Anderson's *If . . .* (1969); and there are the smaller films, like *Kes*. But the smaller films get smaller still, made more and more on the fringe of the industry. Splendid as, in their various ways, *Bleak Moments*, *The Moon and the Sledgehammer*, *All the Advantages* and *My Childhood* are, they come closer and closer to being private films made mainly to satisfy their makers and with little practical hope of wide showing. It is great that we have them, but you can hardly build an industry, or even keep one going, that way.



Is *Isadora* a British film? Hard to say. But then, as Karel Reisz points out, it hardly matters: Britishness is not the name of the game. *Leo the Last* may be made in Britain by a British director, and nominally set in Britain, but it takes place in an allegorical no-man's-land and does not feel British at all. Ken Russell, whatever one may think of his films, is clearly *sui generis*, and escapes all easy definition. What nationality is *The Lion in Winter*? Even formally, I don't know, and I doubt if a factual check on its status would throw much light.

But the real test case, in my opinion, is *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*. It is set in Britain today, directed, written and acted by Britishers. Though financed by American money, it would seem to be as thoroughly British as *If . . .* or *Kes* (which were both also backed by American money). And yet I have no feeling of its being in any real sense a British film. It is not an American film either, it is not a mid-Atlantic film, it is just a film. A film I like very much, as it happens, but not a film rooted in the British experience any more than *Midnight Cowboy* is rooted in the American experience. They both observe, perceptively, from the outside. Schlesinger, for all that he admits to homesickness for England and a continuing desire to film English subjects, looks suspiciously like the first of the truly international British film-makers. It is strange, if you take two films which are quite closely comparable, *Accident* and *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, that the first seems unmistakably a British film, though directed by a long-resident American; the second, though directed by an Englishman, does not.

How to explain that? Mainly, I suppose, by a gradual but perceptible shift of sensibility. Not only can we no longer practically function as a tight little island. We do not even feel like that any more. And it is doubtful if that is a bad thing. The only bad thing would be if those who want to make intensely British subjects are no longer able to do so. *O Lucky Man!* seems to me, pace Karel Reisz, such a subject, such a film. It would be a thousand pities, artistically as well as practically, if it proved to be the last made on such a scale. Since the decree against British subjects is quite arbitrary, no doubt it could be lifted tomorrow: the tottering pound may make filming in England so cheap as to be an offer American studios can't refuse. *Don't Look Now*, in some respects an international-looking film but in others, especially its impatience with narrative, very British, may repeat its runaway success in America and, just as arbitrarily, convince American producers that British films are box-office again. But even if that did happen, we may reasonably feel sure that once our chicks have flown the nest, some will never return, and those who do are unlikely to come back in the same spirit that they left. A distinctively British contribution to international cinema there is, and we trust there always will be. But 'British cinema' in its old sense looks as dead as the dodo. ■



The other face of British films. Above: Don Siegel in England for 'Drabble'. Left: Irving Kershner, Donald Sutherland, Elliott Gould filming 'S\*P\*Y\*S' in a London street





# IMAGES OF BRITAIN

Above: 'A Private Enterprise'. Below: Stephen Archibald in 'My Ain Folk'

David Wilson





British cinema is pronounced dead, and the funeral rites are performed over what remains of the corpse. And after a decent interval, if the word is right, the fact that the dollar is running advantageously against an ailing pound will bring a new invasion of American capital investment. If there is to be a ghost of British cinema, it will speak with an American accent. On current prospects there'll always be an Eady, and a sickly Britain in the mid-70s is as attractive a transatlantic proposition as a swinging Britain was in the mid-60s. The scenario is depressingly familiar, despite recent attempts to rewrite it. What Leon Clore's scheme and the ACTT's prospectus for nationalisation of the industry have in common is that they are based on a foundation of subsidy. And if British cinema is not to lose its production status and dwindle into a service industry, subsidy is what it will need.

Small areas of subsidy exist already, of course, though now that the National Film Finance Corporation is virtually dormant the actual money involved is a drop in the ocean. Even where there is a subsidy, government cutbacks have threatened it. The British Film Institute's Production Board is currently funded at around £100,000, of which about 25% comes from the Eady Fund and some 60% in the form of a direct grant from the Department of Education and Science. The last government's decision to trim public expenditure, and the subsequent wholesale cuts in the DES programme, was unwelcome news to a Production Board geared to expansion. Like most tried and tested British institutions, and short of a national economic disaster, the Board will probably survive, one of the last outposts of an indigenous British cinema.

It all depends, of course, on what you mean by British cinema. On another page of this issue Karel Reisz suggests that films like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *A Kind of Loving* and *This Sporting Life*, hailed at the time (and since) as ushering in a new and vital era of British cinema, owed much of what has been regarded as their intrinsically British quality to 'severely practical reasons'. This isn't what they were saying in the halcyon days of Woodfall. Hindsight denies what looked like a continuity, if not a common purpose, in the post-Suez years of British cinema. Retrospectively, the emergence of a British New Wave, so called, had more to do with an accident of time and circumstance, a shared mood rather than a common impetus. Reisz, Richardson, Schlesinger, Clayton had no more in common as British film-makers than Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol and Rohmer in France; small wonder if, like them, they have gone their separate ways. And let them, says Mamoun Hassan, who this month leaves the Production Board after navigating a course which has involved support for experienced as well as apprentice film-makers. Hassan describes the provincial realist directors of the early Sixties as 'the lights that failed'; and is confident that the work now being done at the Board represents the kind of films which can be made in Britain from subjects which are recognisably British in the sense that they owe something to a British tradition, whether it is historical, social, literary or cinematic. It's no small irony, and perhaps some kind of comment on our own currently expatriate film-makers, that such confidence in the Britishness of British cinema is voiced by a Saudi Arab.

If there is a continuing British cinematic tradition, it can probably be located in the

documentary movement, and more specifically in the poetic realism which reached its peak of expression in the films of Humphrey Jennings. The line can be traced through the Ealing social films and some of the work of the Free Cinema directors; and survives in the films of Lindsay Anderson, interestingly the only major director of his generation who has, as it were, stayed at home. Two of the films in Free Cinema's first programme (nearly twenty years ago) were made with the assistance of the Experimental Film Fund, the forerunner of the Production Board. Mamoun Hassan would like to see a programme of Production Board films at the NFT, not simply as a showcase for the Board's work, but as a demonstration (and almost certainly a revelation) of one area of British cinema which is ignored in most of the talk about the crisis. Such a programme might contain a few surprises for those lamenting the demise of a distinctively British cinema.

The programme might begin with Bill Douglas' *My Ain Folk*, which at the time of writing is due to open commercially in London. This is the second part of the projected autobiographical trilogy which began with *My Childhood*. The setting is still the Scottish mining village of Newcraighall just after the war. *My Childhood* left eight-year-old Jamie alone after the loss of his German POW friend and the death of his grandmother. The new film begins with his paternal grandmother reluctantly agreeing to take him in. The network of relationships is confusing, and on a first viewing likely to throw even an audience which accepts that the connections are just as shadowy to the boy himself. But narrative certainties are unimportant for Douglas. Even more than its predecessor, *My Ain Folk* is constructed from images laid together like bricks; precisely composed, often static, emotionally charged.

Objects are isolated, gestures set apart, remembered and repeated. In *My Childhood* Jamie lovingly nursed an apple intended as a gift for his wrecked mother. Here he steals an apple to place by the bed of his grandfather, who has also been incarcerated (why and for how long we never know) in an institution. His grandmother replaces the stolen apple with a mousetrap, inviting him to steal again; then later, in a rare moment of affection, gives him another apple. In a world of his own for a moment, the old man sits with his spoon poised over a bowl, and the shot is held through an uncomfortable void of frozen time. Later, during a totally silent tea, Jamie's grandmother is caught repeating the gesture. For the

adults, emotion is held in check, erupting occasionally and violently under the slow accumulation of hidden pressure. A long, silent close-up of the grandmother slowly and methodically twirling her thumbs signals a sudden rush for a cupboard and a knife wrenched from its place of safety. Refuge in this bleak, bare world is a hiding place—the slag heap in which Jamie buries his mother's coveted pearls, the table to crawl under as he waits for his grandmother to find him out.

Dialogue is rare since communication is a matter of looks and gestures and unarticulated acts of complicity. The images are elemental but often charged, given time and stillness to suggest a web of associations. Douglas ends the film on a shot of the walls of the institutional home to which Jamie has been sent, held long enough for a pipe band, playing 'Scotland the Brave', to march round the corner and past the camera, which remains fixed on the building as the band moves out of frame. It is an image which could stand for the whole film, a view of Scotland bitterly mocked by the grim reality of all that has preceded it. This last shot is also one of the few moments in the film when Douglas steps back to take in the view beyond the world as it is seen and interpreted by his childhood self. Elsewhere the view is at once his own and Jamie's, a bitterly retrospective look at a bitterly felt childhood. There is one recurring shot which powerfully suggests the double resonance of so much of the film's apparently simple imagery. A black screen momentarily fills with lights which move slowly down and out of the frame. The film begins with this image, which then merges into the colour of a cinema screen; and it is only when it is repeated in isolation that one realises that the lights are miners' lamps and the downward movement a pit cage descending a shaft. The effect of that first shot is to suggest a conjunction, in the boy's mind, between two worlds of darkness and mystery.

The mystery is sometimes as difficult to pin down as the relationships, again perhaps because the hurt and confusion of the adult world seems inexplicable to the child, for whom emotion and its cause are one and the same. Death occurs, or at least is referred to, at several moments in the film—in Jamie's mind an incident like any other. One shot registers the impossibility of separating the reality of the event from the shape it takes in the imagination of a child. A horse-drawn hearse moves slowly across the horizon as Jamie cowers in a field. The slight diagonal of the composition suggests a dream; or perhaps this is simply death as a child sees it. All through the film Jamie is isolated from the real meaning of adult experience. Appropriately, since Jamie, like any child, reads no meaning into what the adults do to him and only wonders at the mystery of what they do to each other.

*My Ain Folk* is mostly built from single, static images; sequences assembled from a series of individual shots whose cumulative effect is to elicit an emotional rather than an intellectual response, mood rather than narrative connection. The film's non-narrative style, and in particular the way it uses sound and image to build an effect of disjunction (thereby emphasising Jamie's isolation), recalls the elaborate structural method of Jennings. Not the least echo of



Jennings are two moments (Jamie in the schoolroom, the miners going down the shaft) when the image is accompanied on the soundtrack by a hymn—an effect used also, though with less resonance, in *My Childhood*. Associative montage—editing to build a synthesis of mood and emotion—is unfashionable at a time when the ‘poetic’ effect is mistrusted. Which is curious when one considers that it is a keynote of some of the most vital work of British cinema—and, in the films of Denis Mitchell, of British television. (It’s worth mentioning, as a footnote to this, that one of the few really memorable television documentaries of the last year or two, *A Life Apart*, was made by Michael Grigsby, whose *Enginemen*, made with the help of the Experimental Film Fund, was shown in the last Free Cinema programme.) And interestingly the credits of *My Ain Folk* acknowledge a debt to Lindsay Anderson, the one established director whose work reflects the continuity of this particular tradition of British cinema. It may not be coincidental that the only major British film of the early Sixties which hasn’t dated is *This Sporting Life*.

A different, though related, tradition is echoed in another Production Board film, Peter Smith’s *A Private Enterprise*. Though if the style here has its roots in documentary, the subject is entirely original. To say that the film is about Indian immigrants in the industrial Midlands would be to suggest an emphasis which is never there: the ‘problems’ of integration and shifting cultural values are built into the fabric of the film, but they are only incidentally what it is about. Shiv Verma (Salmaan Peer) is an engineering graduate with ambition but no outlet for it. A strike at the Birmingham factory in which he works gives him time to look for a site for the business (plastic Indian novelties) he wants to set up. There’s a future in plastics, he thinks; more future at any rate than in joining his friend Ashok on the picket lines. Meanwhile family pressures are mounting. His uncle, who runs a small cushion-making concern, is anxious for him to marry a rich businessman’s daughter whom he has never seen. The dowry would be a better business proposition than selling plastic elephants: ‘Building castles in the air easy, starting factories not easy.’ Steered in all directions, Shiv is quietly determined to go his own way.

His progress from ambition to slightly bewildered resignation is charted from a vantage point which is almost always neutral. Comment there is, but it is built into particular situations and arises naturally from them. The narrative structure is fragmentary, as Smith crosscuts between the warring influences on Shiv’s future direction. By settling its focus on this one character the film achieves a kind of double perspective: Shiv’s view of the choices open to him is adjusted by what we know of him as he tries to steer his own course through the crosscurrents of other people’s need of him. The measure of Peter Smith’s film is that while it sets up expectations it can also spring surprises, adroitly encompassing homegrown attitudes to the immigrant (uncomprehending, deferential, overcompensating) in its view of the immigrant’s experience of trying to accommodate his ingrained cultural traditions within an

environment which is fundamentally alien but not necessarily hostile.

Shiv is caught between two worlds, eager to test the challenge of a new game but at the same time unable and despite himself unwilling to forget the rules of the old one; it is after all an Indian toy elephant he’s trying to sell in English shops. The ambivalence of his situation is nicely caught in the dialogue, with the slightly formal, sometimes pompous and, in the uncle’s case, fractured Indian English unexpectedly and incongruously punctuated by sturdy British colloquialisms. As it happens (as it usually happens), Shiv’s final choice is fashioned more by circumstances than by inclination. Preferring to go one way, he is constantly being pulled in another. On the train back from London after his hesitant encounter with the businessman’s daughter (‘We do all our shopping at Harrods,’ she counters to his nervous conversational gambit about Birmingham’s Bull Ring) Shiv meets an English girl; but when they meet again, she wants only to take him to Indian films—in Hindi—or introduce him to her swami. ‘You must have an awful lot of things in common,’ she ventures as he mentally registers this latest fashion in Indian exports to the West. Later, arriving early for a party at the girl’s house, he is shown the family’s set of Indian wood carvings as the girl swoons at the feet of a new guru, black this time. Two cultures will never meet, it’s implied, if they insist on wearing each other’s clothes.

The scales are gently tipped one way and the other, and a wry humour holds the balance. Trying to be his own man, Shiv is ill at ease in most of his encounters. Other people—British and Indian—expect a response from him which accords with their image of what he should be, and are disappointed by his own uncertainty about himself. The two cultures are closest in their pretensions, which each of them is trying to hide under a hat that doesn’t fit. Meeting the English girl among her fellow mystics, Shiv—as the Indian—is the uncomfortable intruder. Insecure in his own role, he is the first to see through the mask which hides a heritage. ‘I’m an Indian businessman, I know our ethics—don’t trust anybody,’ his prospective father-in-law tells him among the luxury trophies of his Regent’s Park house; and Shiv’s discomfort stems from his own instinctive awareness of the unconscious irony of this two-faced encounter. The film ends with an unforced but pointed image of this awkward conjunction of two worlds. The uncle has died in a fire which destroys his workshop. Family and friends attend an English cremation, then take the ashes to scatter them over the waters of an English lake.

Peter Smith has made documentaries and films for the Children’s Film Foundation, another beneficiary of Eady money. Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo have been in the business of film-making, one way and another, for close on twenty years, but couldn’t get their *Comrade Jacob* film off the ground (see Kevin Brownlow’s account of this lost battle in the Autumn 1972 *SIGHT AND SOUND*) until the Production Board agreed to support it. Based on David Caute’s novel about the Diggers, a 17th century

group who set up a prototype alternative society by occupying common land until they were put down by Cromwell’s General Fairfax, the film is now being edited. But to judge from a brief extract, this is a historical film with more than incidental contemporary relevance (it was pressure from the landowners which finally prompted military intervention to drive the Diggers off). And the photography, by Ernest Vincze, looks stunning.

Other Production Board films nearing completion include *Moon Over the Alley*, a feature-length musical about Notting Hill by Chuck Despins and William Dumasq (*Duffer*), with music by Galt MacDermot. The importance of making the film under Production Board auspices, Mamoun Hassan thinks, is that the directors will not be subject to the kind of pressures which MacDermot’s name on the credits could have meant if this had been a full-scale commercial production. Steve Dwoskin is completing a feature which is evidently a development of the structural experiments of his previous work. And David Gladwell is editing a feature called *The Village*, a kind of dramatised documentary which Mamoun Hassan describes as the Production Board’s *Akenfield*. Projects under consideration at the moment include a film by Mike Leigh (*Bleak Moments*) about a taxi-driver caught up in the underworld; and films by Maurice Hatton (*Praise Marx and Pass the Ammunition*), the West Indian director Horace Ove (a feature about immigrant children), and Tony Bicat, whose *Skinflicker*, also made for the Board, shared an Academy double bill with *My Childhood*.

These are all directors with experience. But the Board, currently vetting some 300 projects a year, is equally concerned to give a chance to new directors. In the current year ten test sequences have been made by complete beginners. One of these was cut by Kevin Brownlow, exemplifying Mamoun Hassan’s initiative of encouraging filmmakers to work on each other’s films; Tony Bicat, for instance, was associate producer on *My Ain Folk*. But the future is uncertain.

At the current rate of expansion Mamoun Hassan doesn’t think the Board can continue as it is, with £100,000 a year and concessions from the unions on crewing and salaries (the average cost of a Board feature is around £15,000). The Board is already developing into a kind of production centre, and Mamoun Hassan is anxious that its cooperative working methods should not be hampered by lack of funds. The other large area of uncertainty of course is distribution, but that’s another story. All the same there may be a lesson here for the future of British film-making. Smaller films mean more films and less need for blanket distribution. On current form it’s a large hope, but a major change in distribution patterns, with a move away from the mass audience expectations which are seldom realised and towards the large minorities of a fragmented culture, may well be what is needed if British cinema is to survive in any recognisably British shape. There is no lack of ideas, only a lack of the administrative imagination needed to try them out.

Opposite: ‘Comrade Jacob’ Photo: Bob Davies







# IN THE PICTURE



## Tehran Festival

It's not every festival which invites critics to take time off on a sight-seeing tour. The mosques of Isfahan, the royal tents at Persepolis (De Mille never built an epic set like that), nightly banquets fit for an Empress (and in the presence of the Empress)—the Tehran festival, in its second year, was ostentatiously inviting recognition not just as another stopover on the international circuit but as a four-star attraction. And if a belly dancer at a banquet caused less of a stir than Ann Miller, who danced for old times' sake, that was all part of the circus. Better timed, better organised than in its inaugural year, Tehran confirmed its bid to establish itself as the Cannes of the Middle East, not least in its determination to show films round the clock and all over its sprawling city.

Big guns were wheeled on, some of them (*Sounder* was in competition, *Cries and Whispers* closed the festival) looking a little rusty after previous outings. The Grand Prix was taken by a new film, Francesco Rosi's *Lucky Luciano*, which looks at the career of the Mafia's narcotics king following his deportation from America in 1946. Rosi's fascination with the mechanics of power goes back at least as far as *Mani sulla Città*. Here, as in *The Mattei Affair*, the approach is built round what one might call an oblique precision: the facts and figures and driving, many-layered narrative of investigative journalism.

The scene shifts disconcertingly in place and time, from a UN narcotics commission (a sticky passage, with American actors choking on translated English dialogue) to a reconstruction of Vito Genovese's open manipulation of the black market in wartime Naples. Luciano himself, played with icy, lethal charm by Gian Maria Volonté, is seldom seen

anywhere near the scene of the crime. Indeed, there's a suggestion, in the way the explosive violence of his early American progress is shot through a romantic haze of neon lights and narrow streets, that the actual perpetration of crime was merely youthful escapade. Now, exiled in his native land, he is isolated and inviolable, a dapper figure as he strolls round a race-track carrying a little black dog or sets up a deal on a dull day in the ruins of Pompeii. It is a nice and not too forced irony that at the end he dies quietly and ingloriously, from a heart attack at an airport while listening to plans for a film about his life. The last laugh to Luciano, and to Rosi. Though the built-in hazard of the film's diffuse lens is to leave the subject under the microscope as elusive to the viewer as he appears to have been to the international police.

From the old king to the young pretenders in *Mean Streets*, Martin Scorsese's feverish, flawed but takingly self-assured profile of the lower depths of Mafia society, which was discussed in the last SIGHT AND SOUND. The Tehran audience seemed to appreciate the energetic improvisation but was somewhat overwhelmed by the monotone intensity. They warmed more, understandably but I think wrongly, to the frantic comedy of *Teresa la Ladra*, a first feature by the cameraman Carlo Di Palma which has Monica Vitti miscast as a fisherman's daughter who runs away from home and drifts into a life of petty crime.

After this noisy farrago it was a relief to turn to the contemplative quiet of Toichiro Narushima's *Time Within Memory*, which takes a man back to the island of his childhood in search of the soul of his mother. Exquisitely photographed, Proustian in its focusing on the way that simple nature evokes complex memories, and with some extraordinarily haunted scenes (a spirit-conjuring cere-

mony, the mother dancing on a cliff-top bathed in mysterious light), the film nevertheless seemed to be missing a real substance behind its hallucinating surface. In the end the beautiful images were no more than that, the sea changes of an insubstantial ghost of time.

Memories of a different kind persist from films otherwise best forgotten, like Jeanne Moreau mooning round a Brazilian sugar plantation in Carlos Diegues' over-heated *Joana la Francesca*. Elsewhere, and particularly in the festival's sideshow of African films, Third World cinema revealed its best form when its pedigree was home-bred. The two Iranian films marked a sharp distinction between originality and imitation. Echoes of Truffaut and Olmi were suggested by Sohrab Shahid Sales' *A Simple Event*, but they were neither distracting nor destructive of a film which wins respect for its modest determination to mark out an area of its own. The achievement here is to make repetition seem progressive and revealing. The repetition is a family routine: every day a schoolboy runs from his lessons to help his father land his (illegal) catch from the Caspian. We watch this ritual several times, from the same perspective. Long passages without dialogue, since any dialogue other than the everyday banalities would break the rhythm of these village lives, are punctuated by the sparest of musical emphases. The style is as bleak and unmodulated as the boy's experience, a childhood where each event is as simple as the next. The death of the boy's mother is recorded with no more emphasis than anything else in a life whose only purpose is itself. The sense is of a suspension of time in a place where the pressures of time would have no meaning.

For all its faint echoes of European cinema, *A Simple Event* registers on its own terms. The other Iranian film, Parviz Kimiani's *The Mongols*, is a veritable ragbag

Kimiani's 'The Mongols'



of consciously acknowledged influences. Indeed, it announces itself immediately as no less than a meditation on cinema, as a television director turns over the pages of books on the great pre-cinema pioneers and their photogenic inventions spring to life. Meanwhile the director's wife is writing a thesis on the Mongol invasion: a cue for Mongols, not horses, to dance round an animated zoetrope. Invention gives way to gimmickry as nightmare fantasy impinges on the man's hesitations. He finds himself bringing television to the tribesmen of the south—and the desert sprouts TV aerials and a spiralling labyrinth of celluloid. 'Why,' ask the Turkoman villagers, watching an instructional programme, 'do we need television to teach us how to plant trees when we already know?'

A reasonable question, suggesting a possibly fascinating line of inquiry into the global village. With the arrival of television, the local storyteller is superannuated. Then 'Where is cinema?', and an iron gate materialises in the sand, its doorbell announcing 'Jean-Luc Godard' as the soundtrack reverberates with Jeanne Moreau singing 'Ma Ligne de Chance'. Somewhere buried under all this artifice is a lively imagination; visually at least the film is inventive to a fault. And somewhere between the calculated indulgence of *The Mongols* and the calculated restraint of *A Simple Event* the message is that the Iranian cinema is alive and well, like the country itself confidently straddling the frontiers of two worlds.

DAVID WILSON

## Barry Lyndon

Stanley Kubrick has been shooting his tenth feature film this winter; and as usual at this stage on a Kubrick picture, nobody is giving much information away. Title: *Barry Lyndon*. Leading players: Ryan O'Neal, Marisa Berenson,





Rosini's 'Lucky Luciano'

Hardy Kruger. Production designer: Ken Adam. Setting: Ireland—including some country houses whose owners wanted them back over Christmas, so that the production had to break off for a few weeks. No one has told us how Kubrick came upon the Thackeray novel *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, which is so far out of print that it seems fairly hard to come by.

It's a strange, clever, rather basically unlikeable book, lacking the geniality and character depth of the later *Vanity Fair* but full of the novelist's steel. Barry, the Irish braggart hero, tells his own first-person story, gradually unmasking the seedy, conscienceless, hard underside of genial picaresque narratives like *Tom Jones*. At the outset, he's a callow Irish boy, stuffed with unsupported snobberies about his fine family, who has to leave home in a hurry, gets taken for a ride in Dublin by tricksters a fraction higher in the scale of sophistication, and in some desperation enlists in the English army.

It is the period of the Seven Years War, and Barry is present at Minden—though seeing no more of the action than Stendhal's hero does at Waterloo. Later, he's press-ganged into the Prussian service; and when soldiers are no longer in demand, becomes a servant and part of the Prussian capital's spy network ('We had all spies over each other'). He is rescued by an encounter with a dandified old uncle who lives by gambling and his wits, enjoys shaky affluence as a professional gambler, but finally decides to retire into the ideal career—marriage to a rich woman. Having hooked his fish, he plays her into matrimony with a combination of bullying, blackmail and cold connivance worthy of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. But Barry can't manage the riches he has acquired, wrecks his wife's estate, almost drives the lady herself demented, and finally vanishes under a sea of debts into the Fleet Prison, with only his tough old mother to look after him.

Thackeray's skill is in darkening the colours: the amiable rogue completes his rake's progress as a sottish boor, the dashing duellist is revealed as a murderous bully, the blustering descendant of the kings of Ireland in fact deceives no one, but is tolerated in society as professional gamblers usually are. In *Clockwork Orange*, part of Kubrick's achievement lay in winning sympathy for the outrageous Alex; and perhaps *Barry Lyndon* is in a sense the reverse of the coin.

For a relatively short novel, *Barry Lyndon* covers a lot of ground. Life in the ranks demands 'the condition of the proper fighting beast.' At court, everyone is a spy, and usually suffers for it: 'those sharp tools with which great people cut out their enterprises are generally broken in the using.' At one stage, Barry returns to his Irish home, now in tumbledown decay, and reflects, 'Some day, I wonder, will everything we have seen and thought and done come and flash across our minds . . . ? I had rather not.' As soldier, gambler, wife-beater, con man and finally prisoner, Barry Lyndon is an anti-hero at large in a raffish and generally reprehensible society; and a character wide open for a film-maker's interpretation. It seemed a little startling when one read that Kubrick was retreating from the future into a nineteenth century novel about an eighteenth century rogue. The book opens up possibilities which suggest that, as usual, Kubrick knows exactly what he's about.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

## People's Pictures

'Your next door neighbour could have three heads and you wouldn't know.' A woman in Balham is talking, though it might be anywhere in these days of high rise living and uprooted communities. Balham is an inner suburb in southwest London, a bit of a joke to people who don't live there ever

since it was immortalised by Peter Sellers in a Goon Show record as the 'gateway to the South'. You could be forgiven, on your way to the South, for failing to notice that you had passed through it. But thanks to Project Octopus, the people of Balham have recently had the chance to get to know more about themselves.

Project Octopus was launched last summer by Liberation Films, as an attempt to explore the potential for the use of videotape in community action. Preliminary contacts suggested three likely areas for the experiment, of which Balham was one. An informal community organisation, the Balham Action Group, had already started an adventure playground for local children, and one day last summer they held a jumble sale to raise money for coach trips. Liberation filmed the event;

and from this and impromptu interviews in the local market (Balham used to be a self-contained community, said one vox pop, but now 'you've got the League of Nations here') and on a housing estate a film was pieced together. News of the filming spread, and a few days later Liberation showed their 'trigger' film to a group of mothers and children. Reaction was mixed, but enthusiastic enough for another show to be arranged. When the lights went up, the audience didn't need prompting. People began to discover that concern about local issues was shared by neighbours they had never talked to.

The discussion settled on four separate issues: refuse collection, the need for a community centre, local prostitution, and the lack of a pedestrian crossing on busy Bedford Hill. The meeting was recorded, on half-inch videotape, and then played back. People like seeing themselves on film, and some of them were intrigued enough by the simplicity of the equipment to want to know how to use it. A few lessons later they were ready to go out and film their own interviews. Housewives toting cameras and microphones stopped people in the streets to ask them about rubbish and a community centre. Accidents happened: one of the tapes was later found to have no soundtrack after someone had forgotten to notice a fault in the equipment. One point that did emerge from this first venture is that it is easier to get people to talk against something (rubbish) than for (the community centre). People will talk when the problem is in their own backyards.

In the event it was an unscheduled incident which proved the point. A child was knocked down on Bedford Hill; mothers organised a protest sit-down, stopping the traffic, and the video

Project Octopus: videotaping in Balham





crews recorded it. One of the people interviewed on an earlier tape had mentioned the difficulty of getting people to unite—a view now overtaken by events. The Balham tape-makers decided what they wanted from their material, Liberation did the technical editing, and a show was arranged at the local library. Over a hundred people turned up, and the debate was lively. 'I've lived here since 1941,' said one woman, 'and I've never met half the people in this room.'

Liberation made their own 16 mm. film of the Balham experiment, which they have called *Starting to Happen*. They emphasise that there are no ground rules for introducing local communities to the potential of videotape. Project Octopus fared differently in different areas. In Plumstead, where the project focused round a community theatre and a social club, the response was less encouraging; the lesson here (though it may be different elsewhere) being that where community groups are already well established the unknown quantity of video can seem like a positive threat. But in Poplar, where the initial focus was a community festival, the video idea was so enthusiastically welcomed that Liberation have since returned to explore the possibility of extending the project beyond its initial impetus.

The organiser of the Balham Action Group says in *Starting to Happen* that community use of video can provide a focal point for local initiative. It was starting to happen in Balham, but it was the spontaneous reaction to a road accident which really got things moving. No one, least of all Liberation Films, is going to claim anything more for community video than that it can be a means to an end, an advertisement for action. But on the basis of Project Octopus the possibilities seem unlimited, particularly in areas where local feeling needs a local focus. The door is wide open.

DAVID WILSON

## B.F.I. Award 1973

The British Film Institute Award for 1973 has been made to the Georgian director Georgy Shengelaya for *Pirosmani*, shown at last year's London Film Festival. The film records the life and times of the Georgian primitive painter Niko Pirosmani (1863–1918) through a visual style which is itself an extension of the painter's preoccupations and methods. Shengelaya (whose director father was one of the pioneers of Georgian cinema) casts his film in a series of episodes—some set in a bare, dry landscape with Pirosmani's favourite sheep much in evidence, others in a period Tiflis (including a charming visit to a music hall where Pirosmani is enraptured by a buxom singer). *Pirosmani* confirms that unusual and experimental work is being done in the Soviet republics, and it is to be

hoped that this award may encourage the wider showing of other, much discussed works by these vigorous film-makers.

With the main award goes a special mention to the German director Werner Herzog, whose *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* was also shown at the Festival. Herzog's trademark is his spare, concentrated visual style. Images of magical beauty (the myriad windmills in *Signs of Life*, the desert sculpture in *Fata Morgana*, the first and last shots of *Aguirre*) alternate with austere, powerful visions of dissolution and desolation. Original, consistent and never less than surprising, his films also deserve a wider audience. Of his four features to date, only *Even Dwarfs Started Small* has had more than a few screenings in this country. Is there a distributor in the house?

## Saura's *La Prima Angelica*

Thirty-five years after its conclusion, the Spanish Civil War still awaits a Spanish film which, to paraphrase the doyen of Spanish film critics, Alfonso Sanchez, would state certain truths and either check or at least reply to the impression given by foreign films. Fortunately there are signs that the making of such a film may not be too long delayed. The irrefutable comment on the psychological devastation caused by the Nationalist victory propounded in Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* has now been followed by *La Prima Angelica*, the latest film of Carlos Saura.

*La Prima Angelica* is the first film by Saura to give sustained attention to the Civil War since *La Caza*, in which a hunting expedition by friends who fought together in the war ends in their deaths. This was both an allegory

of the war and a comment on the generation which had waged it, the same generation still firmly in power in 1966 when *La Caza* appeared.

In *La Prima Angelica*, scripted by Saura himself and Rafael Azcona, a man returns to a town for the first time in thirty years. Staying with relatives, he relives episodes of his childhood in the 1930s, especially his relationship with his cousin Angelica and the trauma of punishment when this is discovered. What the film suggests is that the forces of repression and reaction which punish the boy are the same forces which supported Franco's rebellion.

The mood of fearful uncertainty at the beginning of the war is evoked in one notable scene. It is August 1936, the first month of the war, and a provincial town helplessly awaits the arrival of an army. But which army? The streets are empty and electricity has been cut off. Indoors, with shutters closed, a family waits. The women clasp rosaries and pray aloud while the men crouch over the radio. One, a member of the Falange, confesses that he is expecting a disaster. Then the radio plays a Nationalist tune and with shouts of 'They're ours, they're ours,' the shutters are wrenched open and the family rushes to the balcony. One realises the impact of an alien force, the Army of Africa, abroad in the land, the horror of fratricidal strife.

*La Prima Angelica* is given an extra perspective by these scenes set in the past. Saura disdains having characters at different ages played by different actors, so that there is no difference in the appearance of characters in the scenes set in the present from scenes set in the past. This device contributes to the success of the film in going further than Saura's others in analysing and commenting on the forces which constitute contem-

porary Spain. What in his last film, *Ana y los Lobos*, was too extreme, almost ludicrous criticism of the Spanish upper bourgeoisie is here totally convincing. The characters in *La Prima Angelica* are credible people, not symbols like the brothers in *Ana y los Lobos*. One accepts them as one accepts, whatever their vagaries, the husband and wife in *The Spirit of the Beehive*.

There are indications, including a speech by the new head of Spanish Television, and the Director of Popular Culture's plea that intellectuals in exile since 1939 should return to Spain, that there is a change of mood, that censorship of films will slacken. Perhaps this was to be expected as more and more the government is composed of people too young to have fought in the war. Not that *La Prima Angelica*'s producer Elias Querejeta has had many problems with the censor. His films are prestige productions certain to achieve more success outside Spain than inside, and so scenes can be passed which would be cut from films destined for a popular showing inside Spain. It is worth noting here that *The Spirit of the Beehive*, also produced by Querejeta, is the first film since 1939 to show the Guardia Civil getting their man, when they machine-gun the *maquis* hiding in the desolate barn. Erice's film was also memorable for its correctness, for getting Castile right.

Not, of course, that realism has been neglected by the Spanish cinema, as some of the best films of the last decade, for instance Angelino Fons' version of the Pio Baroja novel *La Busca* and Jorge Grau's *El Espontáneo*, bear witness. Grau's film, with its beautiful flow and evocation of Madrid working class life, might have made a considerable impact on public opinion had its release not been so restricted. Financial and other pressures ensure the sad

Georgy Shengelaya's '*Pirosmani*', winner of the 1973 B.F.I. Award





spectacle of talented directors like Grau and Fons having to make bad commercial films.

It is tantalising to speculate about what might have happened to the Spanish cinema if the Second Republic had been granted more years of life. Judging by the recent selection at the Filmoteca Nacional in Madrid of films made between 1931 and 1936, neo-realism was not far away. The heartening fact about *The Spirit of the Beehive* (the first Spanish film to win first prize at San Sebastian) and *La Prima Angélica* is that they should encourage Spanish directors to attempt something other than sex comedies, horror films and dramas of matrimonial separation. These two films by Erice and Saura should signal a shift of emphasis on to what has been going on intermittently in the Spanish cinema but has never received enough due: films which get Spain right, films which may contribute to the serious discussion of the Civil War and the period since the Civil War which the country deserves and needs so badly.

ROGER MORTIMORE

## Money for the Swiss

The Swiss New Wave did not happen quite by chance. There are discernible historical and economic reasons why it is only now—in their forties, and fifteen years after their return home from their London period—that Alain Tanner and Claude Goretta have emerged with *The Salamander* and *The Invitation* as directors in the world class, and part of a school of new Swiss cinema. Eventually, it is due to the limited but determined intention of government support for the cinema which was agreed when a Federal law of 1962 gave a measure of financial aid. Since 1970, when this government aid was considerably augmented, a part of the fund has been made available for feature production.

Currently the annual credit stands at two million Swiss francs; and the latest report of the Department of Home and Cultural Affairs says that 'support is granted from the viewpoint of cultural policy and based on the criteria of quality and continuity, independent of the content and artistic tendency of a film' (which is encouragingly ambiguous). The aid takes various forms. Most significant are the production credits, which can amount to as much as fifty per cent of the total costs, not exceeding 300,000 Swiss francs, for feature or other films.

In 1972-73 repayable production credits were granted to three features, Pierre Koralnik's *La Sainte Famille*, Goretta's *The Invitation* and Xavier Koller's *Hambal*, as well as five 'other films', shorts and documentaries. A system of *Primes de Qualité*, which can go up to 100,000 francs, benefited eight films during the same period, the highest awards (60,000 francs) going to Daniel Schmid's *Heute Nacht*



*Knights of the Round Table* in Robert Bresson's 'Lancelot du Lac'. Photograph: Mario Cimini

oder nie and Michel Soutter's *Les Arpenteurs*. There are also smaller *Primes d'études*, scholarship awards to films which reveal new talents. Additionally there are scholarships for professional and post-graduate studies (in 1972-73 eight students were on scholarships to the London Film School); and credits for screenplays.

Another important source of finance is the support which Télévision Suisse has begun to give to the production of feature-length films, investing a substantial part of the production money against the right to screen the film eighteen months after cinema release. In Geneva this made possible the formation of Groupe Cinq—not a production unit, but a pooling agency which provides a common legal basis to the five film-makers involved, who include Tanner and Goretta.

The traditional split between the Roman-Swiss film-makers, aiming at features, and the German-speaking Swiss centred on Zurich and dedicated to documentary, is breaking down: Peter von Gunten and Markus Imhoof have made their first features, *Nechayev 1869-72* and *Fluchtgefahr*; and a group from Basle have embarked on an action adventure film.

The Swiss might be supposed to have cause for satisfaction in seeing their cinema so auspiciously launched in the international arena. In fact the Government subsidy survives on a narrow marginal vote. A lot of sober Parliamentarians are mistrustful of supporting so frivolous a form; and from time to time express extreme alarm when they actually see the unconforming product they have financed. There was, it is reported, a certain social embarrassment too, when the unsuspecting Swiss Embassy in Paris threw a party for some visiting film-makers

from Geneva; and were quite clearly unprepared for the long hair, beards and generally undiplomatic aspect of some of the nation's most distinguished cinema artists.

DAVID ROBINSON

## Peckinpah in Mexico

'It's not often that Hollywood people take advantage of the real Mexico. The big thing with Hollywood people when they go down is to film the obvious and the facile. For a change it's different; my picture here couldn't have been made anywhere else.' Sam Peckinpah is on the defensive with *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, which he has just finished shooting in and around Mexico City with Warren Oates, Gig Young, Isela Vega and Kris Kristofferson. Although the Hollywood craft unions have lifted their threatened boycott of the new Peckinpah film, he keeps repeating that the reasons for shooting in Mexico City were 'organic'. He adds that he is tempted to say goodbye to Hollywood and move to Mexico.

It has been United Artists which settled with the unions, promising that all post-production work would take place in the U.S. The unions had planned to boycott *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* at cinemas in the States, not only because Peckinpah has said critical things about Hollywood workers and their unions, but because his picture is the first American movie to shoot in Mexico with a 100 per cent Mexican crew.

Peckinpah, completing post-production work at UA's West Coast headquarters at the old Goldwyn Studios, looks old. His face is still cut in the granite of disappointments, but the beard is now completely white and, like

Godard, his flinty gaze is forever shrouded in dark glasses. He turned 48 on February 22. Pauline Kael has called him the youngest legendary American director. She has also called him Hollywood's true fascist.

He has an answer to critics who call his screen violence the most dangerous because the most seductive, those elegiac, slow-motion slaughters and, on the plot level, the manipulations that not only say might makes right but show violence as the only logical way out. 'I have a 25-year-old daughter who is a pacifist who believes that people are born without sin and without anger, which is not necessarily the same thing. Look, people are born to survive. They have instincts that go back millions of years. There is a great streak of violence in every one of us.'

Blood flows again in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, a modern revenge story, and Peckinpah has altered the geometry of the central mayhem by planting his anti-hero, Warren Oates, in the middle of the shoot-out between cold-blooded killer Gig Young, his henchman and the Moreno family (relatives of the much sought Alfredo Garcia) and by shooting the scene against the snow-capped Mount Popocatepetl. United Artists' production notes call it the wildest scene that Peckinpah has ever shot, but he prefers not to comment on that.

'I don't punch people any more,' he says. 'My right hand has turned to mush. It just doesn't work any more. I used to have a hot temper. I still do, but I don't let it out in that direction. Basically, violence itself is stupid.' He has a theory about why audiences get upset by his movies. 'People want to walk out on them, but they can't. They can't turn their faces away. They watch, and that makes them mad.'

AXEL MADSEN



# STAVISKY





Stavisky, in which Alain Resnais explores the legend of the notorious swindler who rocked the already shaky foundations of French political life in the early 1930s, and whose wax museum figure Resnais remembers contemplating at the age of twelve ('I compared him to an Arsène Lupin swindling the rich and helping the poor'). Scripted by Jorge Semprun, with Jean-Paul Belmondo as Stavisky, Anny Duperey as his wife, Sylvia Badesco (left, on stage) and Charles Boyer (below, in car).







## AND BABBITT



Two of the great artist-animators of the golden years of the Disney Studios, Art Babbitt and Grim Natwick, were working and teaching at the Richard Williams Studios in London last summer. To parallel Babbitt's 1934 character analysis of Goofy, which has not previously been published, Richard Williams gives an impression of the animator himself.

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF THE GOOF—JUNE 1934

In my opinion the Goof, hitherto, has been a weak cartoon character because both his physical and mental make-up were indefinite and intangible. His figure was a distortion, not a caricature, and if he was supposed to have a mind or personality, he certainly was never given sufficient opportunity to display

it. Just as any actor must thoroughly analyse the character he is interpreting, to know the special way that character would walk, wiggle his fingers, frown or break into a laugh, just so must the animator know the character he is putting through the paces. In the case of the Goof, the only characteristic which formerly identified itself with him was his voice. No effort was made to endow him with appropriate business to do, a set of mannerisms or a mental attitude.

It is difficult to classify the characteristics of the Goof into columns of the physical and mental, because they interweave, reflect and enhance one another. Therefore, it will probably be best to mention everything all at once.

Think of the Goof as a composite of an everlasting optimist, a gullible Good Samaritan, a half-wit, a shiftless, good-natured

coloured boy and a hick. He is loose-jointed and gangly, but not rubbery. He can move fast if he has to, but would rather avoid any over-exertion, so he takes what seems the easiest way. He is a philosopher of the barber shop variety. No matter what happens, he accepts it finally as being for the best or at least amusing. He is willing to help anyone and offers his assistance even where he is not needed and just creates confusion. He very seldom, if ever, reaches his objective or completes what he has started. His brain being rather vapoury, it is difficult for him to concentrate on any one subject. Any little distraction can throw him off his train of thought and it is extremely difficult for the Goof to keep to his purpose.

Yet the Goof is not the type of half-wit that is to be pitied. He doesn't dribble, drool or shriek. He is a good-natured, dumb bell what thinks he is pretty smart. He laughs at his own jokes because he can't understand any others. If he is a victim of a catastrophe, he makes the best of it immediately and his chagrin or anger melts very quickly into a broad grin. If he does something particularly stupid he is ready to laugh at himself after it all finally dawns on him. He is very courteous and apologetic and his faux pas embarrass him, but he tries to laugh off his errors. He has music in his heart even though it be the same tune forever, and I see him humming to himself while working or thinking. He talks to himself because it is easier for him to know what he is thinking if he hears it first.

His posture is nil. His back arches the wrong way and his little stomach protrudes. His head, stomach and knees lead his body. His neck is quite long and scrawny. His knees sag and his feet are large and flat. He walks on his heels and his toes turn up. His shoulders are narrow and slope rapidly, giving the upper part of his body a thinness and making his arms seem long and heavy, though actually not drawn that way. His hands are very sensitive and expressive and though his gestures are broad, they should still reflect the gentleman. His shoes and feet are not the traditional cartoon dough feet. His arches collapsed long ago and his shoes should have a very definite character.

Never think of the Goof as a sausage with rubber hose attachments. Though he is very flexible and floppy, his body still has a solidity and weight. The looseness in his arms and legs should be achieved through a succession of breaks in the joints rather than through what seems like the waving of so much rope. He is not muscular and yet he has the strength and stamina of a very wiry person. His clothes are misfits, his trousers are baggy at the knees and the pant legs strive vainly to touch his shoe tops, but never do. His pants droop at the seat and stretch tightly across some distance below the crotch. His sweater fits him snugly except for the neck, and his vest is much too small. His hat is of a soft material and animates a little bit.

It is true that there is a vague similarity in the construction of the Goof's head and Pluto's. The use of the eyes, mouth and ears are entirely different. One is dog, the other human. The Goof's head can be thought of in terms of a caricature of a person with a pointed dome—large, dreamy eyes, buck teeth and weak chin, a large mouth, a thick lower lip, a fat tongue and a



bulbous nose that grows larger on its way out and turns up. His eyes should remain partly closed to help give him a stupid, sloppy appearance, as though he were constantly straining to remain awake, but of course they can open wide for expressions or accents. He blinks quite a bit. His ears for the most part are just trailing appendages and are not used in the same way as Pluto's ears except for rare expressions. His brow is heavy and breaks the circle that outlines his skull.

He is very bashful, yet when something very stupid has befallen him, he mugs the camera like an amateur actor with relatives in the audience, trying to cover up his embarrassment by making faces and signalling to them.

He is in close contact with sprites, goblins, fairies and other such fantasia. Each object or piece of mechanism which to us is lifeless, has a soul and personality in the mind of the Goof. The improbable becomes real where the Goof is concerned.

He has marvellous muscular control of his bottom. He can do numerous little flourishes with it and his bottom should be used whenever there is an opportunity to emphasise a funny position.

This little analysis has covered the Goof from top to toes, and having come to his end, I end.

ART BABBITT

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF THE ANIMATOR—JANUARY 1974

He is a funny mixture. He has the bearing of a Marines sergeant (which he was during the war, after leaving Disney following the strike in which he was the principal figure); but he has the mind of a Viennese doctor—which is what he wanted to be. In his youth he always wanted to go to Vienna and study psychiatry; but he couldn't because he was a poor boy from Iowa with relatives to support. So he went to New York and taught himself to be a commercial artist; and gradually got into animation—starting, I think, through Paul Terry.

Arriving at Disney, he was one of four animators on *Three Little Pigs*; and of course that was the great breakthrough in personality animation. Then he animated Goofy, and worked on shorts in preparation for *Snow White*. In the first Disney feature he animated the Queen where she was beautiful, up to the point where she is transformed into the hag. In *Pinocchio* he did most of the animation of Gepetto, and Gepetto almost looks like him. He had that sort of versatility, to characterise the horrid queen or the sentimental wood-carver. Then in *Fantasia* he did primarily the mushroom dance; but he was animation director on a lot of other material. On *Dumbo* he was a supervising animator.

The strike came in 1941. Babbitt had had a personal confrontation with Disney over the low payment of assistants; and Disney ill-advisedly fired him, giving as a reason his union activities. This was directly in contravention of the Wagner Labor Relations Act, and the Union took a strike vote. Babbitt fought Disney through all the courts; and they were obliged to reinstate him, for an uncomfortable period during

which Disney would pass him in the corridor without speaking or even looking at him. He stood it for a year; then he quit.

After the war he and Natwick were with Hubley at UPA—Art did most of *Rooty Toot Toot*. Later he was with Hanna and Barbera. I had heard about him for years before I finally came to meet him. He had seen some of our work, and though he'd not exactly liked it (it was pretty slick) had decided that 'here are some people trying to do an honest job, and that's the first time I've seen that in ten years.' He wasn't all that impressed, but he went to the heart of it.

It turned out he was very interested in teaching people. He was thinking of writing a book to instruct people; and he'd done a course at U.S.C. of which we had copies of students' notes. As it happened he had a fire at his house and all his own lecture notes were burned. So we were able to send him these student notes. He said they were all wrong; but it was something. Then finally I asked him straight out if he would come over and teach us, because we had gone as far as we could go on our own.

He is a great teacher. He has an astonishing lucidity. Most animators are completely incoherent; they are unable to tell you what they are doing. But Art doesn't have any difficulty in showing you how a thing works. He just says: 'Did you notice that that worked because such and such . . . and Hubley did this thing this way?' And when Art says something is wrong, he's invariably right—if you want it to work. He'll say: 'If you want the wheel to go round, this is the way to make it go round. This is the way to make a cypher for making it go round. And this is another way they used to give the impression of it going round. And your problem is that you are to do it with square wheels.' He is completely eloquent. I'm sure that at Disney they created a language about what they were doing; and I'm equally certain that it was he who largely gave a verbal form to it, so that the others could understand it. He has a surgeon's mind; which, I gather, Disney had also.

When he taught in our studio he insisted that people take the course. He started off by saying: 'Please, in my lectures, do not be British. Be crude, be revolting; ask stupid questions. Please do not be polite; otherwise I'm wasting my time.' He's as tough as nails; yet it literally hurt him when someone couldn't get a thing right, couldn't understand it. Then when they got it right, he would dissolve in warmth. His patience was beautiful.

He knows so much about everything—about symphony construction, about the visual arts, about everything to do with the medium. He once decided he would teach himself to play the piano. He's the one in the famous Disney story—when he was learning to play the piano, and Disney said, 'What are you—some kind of fag or something?' He hated Disney for that, because he wanted to understand music to apply it to animation. He knew that *Fantasia* or something like it was inevitable.

On the course he told us: 'An animator must possess a curiosity about everything that exists or moves . . . must be a student of everything that might or does exist. From the shiver of a blade of grass—affected by

an invisible breeze—to the behaviour of a starving hobo eating the first steak he has had in years. From a baby, tentatively trying to walk for the first time—to an elephant doing the can-can.'

I just saw *Fantasia* again and the Dance of the Mushrooms; and he was doing things there—treating perspective as a subsidiary action—that no one else was doing at the time. And he does not do it by feel, as I might, but because he's worked it all out and analysed it. On the course he would say: 'This is the cliché. This is the formula. And this is how to break it.' He would set up the rules and then make you bust them.

And as well as the analytical capacity and the intelligence is the ability to start from basics—to deal with the most minute detail. He knows how the labs process the material; the way celluloid is made, the way the pencil is made. People who know that kind of thing don't usually have artistic ability into the bargain. The ability to discern basics extends to his gift for statements that seem entirely simple and yet reveal vital things one often has not recognised: 'We must learn to create movements if necessary that are caricatures of reality—but done with such guile they are always convincing.' 'We must expand our sense of caricature—to realise that we are not simply exaggerating external appearances—but more important, the inner character, the mood, the situation. A caricature is a satirical essay, not just doubling the size of a bulbous nose.'

My portrait is idolatry, maybe; but how do you not idolise someone who after more than forty years work in his and your medium still can find it 'wonderful, exciting, exacting . . . A medium that has barely been discovered, let alone explored. A medium that can be an art form that encompasses practically all other art forms. A medium that can gratify aesthetically, that is not earth-bound, that can be an invaluable aid in teaching everything from elementary chemistry to the Theory of Relativity.'

RICHARD WILLIAMS

'Orphans' Benefit' (1934). The Goof after Babbitt: 'How to Play Football' (1944)





Ray Bradbury:  
an Interview  
Thomas R. Atkins

FROM  
"THE  
ILLUSTRATED  
MAN"  
HIMSELF!  
FEB. 1972

# THE ILLUSTRATED MAN

Ray Bradbury is one of the few writers bearing the science fiction label to gain serious critical attention. Born in 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois, he now lives in Los Angeles with his wife and four children. His books include *Dark Carnival*, *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Illustrated Man*, *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The October Country*, *Dandelion Wine*, *A Medicine for Melancholy*, *The Machineries of Joy*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and *I Sing the Body Electric*. His most recent books are a children's novel, *The Halloween Tree*, and a collection of poems.

Actually more of an anti-science fiction writer, Bradbury belongs in the tradition of Poe, Wells, and more recently Borges, artists using fantasy to explore fundamental human emotions and themes. An extremely versatile writer, Bradbury has worked in many different fields, from poetry, short stories, novels, plays, to film and television. During the late 1950s and early 1960s he wrote eleven scripts for Alfred Hitchcock Presents. In 1972 his play *Leviathan 99* was premiered on a sound stage at the Samuel Goldwyn Studios in Hollywood.

This interview concentrates on his film career—an aspect of his work very largely neglected by critics. For the printed version I have deleted my questions and slightly rearranged the text so that Bradbury's films are discussed in chronological order.

I was named for Douglas Fairbanks.

I'm a huge film buff. I've been going to movies since I was three years old. The first movie that I recall was *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which I think helped form my character. I fell in love with horror films and became a fan of Lon Chaney from the time I was three until I was ten, when he died. My middle name, of course, is Douglas; I was named for Douglas Fairbanks. When I was born in 1920 he was the big star in the United States, the most romantic daredevil ever, so my mother gave me that middle name. It's kind of fitting, isn't it, that I would wind up going into screenwriting.

Most of my novels and short stories are automatically cinematic. You can shoot them right off the page because I'm a visually oriented writer. Again, I didn't know this but there it is. You've got the shots there. Each sentence or a combination of two sentences is a shot. By reading what it says you can tell whether it's a close-up or a distant shot.



IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE  
(1953)

My original treatment for this film was called 'The Meteor'.

I went to work at Universal in 1952, in late July or early August. Jack Arnold was going to direct, and Bill Allen was my producer. Naturally they were a little nervous at the studio because I was a fledgling screenwriter. For the magnificent sum of \$2,500, I gave them 100-110 pages, which is practically a screenplay.

An interesting thing happened. They had some ideas they wanted me to work on about certain kinds of monsters and electricity and atom power, which I thought were awfully dumb. I said, 'Look, that makes me uncomfortable,' and they said, 'Well, that's the way we want it to go.' So I said, 'Okay, I'll make you a deal. I'll write two versions of the screenplay—one for you and one for me. And I'll do about 30 pages of treatment on each of these. I'll turn them in to you and on that day you hire or fire me for the rest of the treatment. If you go my way I'll stay on, and if we keep going the way you want to go, I'll just have to leave, because I really don't think your idea works well enough.' So I did two versions of the story, one for them (and I did it as well as I could) and one for myself, and



about a week later I handed them to Bill Allen. After 48 hours they said, 'You've proved your point.'

When I finished 'The Meteor' treatment, I wanted to do the screenplay but they were afraid to let me try it. They then brought in Harry Essex. I must confess I haven't sat down and made a cross-reference between the two to see how many lines of mine he used, how many scenes are intact, or inferentially how many scenes of mine influenced him. There's a lot of my treatment in the story.

*It Came From Outer Space* was a refreshing change for its time thematically: recognising the humanity in an alien creature. I tried to get them not to show the creatures at all. That's the way I wrote the script. This happens in film after film. In the film based on M. R. James' *Casting the Runes*, the Tourneur film with Dana Andrews called *The Curse of the Demon* [*Night of the Demon* in the U.K.], the monster was not supposed to be shown except as a cloud of smoke, but Hal Chester was forced by the studio to reshoot some extra footage of this big monster. It works for a moment, but then when the demon comes right into the camera it's obviously a steam-driven or man-driven robot and you stop being scared.

We've all learned from Val Lewton's films, haven't we, and the films Jacques Tourneur did for Lewton, that the less you see the more you are afraid. Of course, the ultimate film of this kind is Robert Wise's *The Haunting*, in which you see nothing whatever. Everything is done with sound, with fantastic photography, with things behind walls, doors bulging in.

*It Came From Outer Space* was the first black and white three-dimensional feature film. The studio didn't tell me it would be three-dimensional. It was one of those last minute things. 3-D was coming on the scene, and the studio decided to do it. That's the trouble with a lot of 3-D films—they didn't really think how to use it constructively.



**THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS**  
(1953)

I had nothing to do with this film, which was indirectly adapted from one of my stories in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

The people responsible for this film at Warner Brothers were getting it ready and called me in to look at the screenplay. Hal Chester, the producer, told me Ray Harryhausen was going to be doing animation for

the film. I've known Ray for years and have always admired his work. They showed me the script and said, 'Will you rewrite it for us?' And I said, 'You know, incidentally, it's very much like a short story of mine called *The Fog Horn*. Indirectly, somehow someone must have picked up a vibration from my story. It had gone into the script and now, very late in the day, they were hiring me to rewrite my own idea. The next day they bought my story. There was no trouble; there were no accusations or anything. That's how the film got made.

Of course, all the ads read 'Based on a story in *The Saturday Evening Post* by Ray Bradbury.' Everyone had seen the *Post* story which had a beautiful illustration, a two-page spread with a dinosaur coming out of the sea and knocking down the lighthouse. It was a great symbol for the film.



**MOBY DICK (1956)**

I got out of bed one morning in London, looked in the mirror, and said, 'I am Herman Melville.'

The reason John Huston selected me to write the screenplay of *Moby Dick* is that he saw in my own books a kinship with Melville. Melville is a poet and a Shakespearean, and I've been influenced by poetry and Shakespeare all my life. In high school I was an actor, and I read all Shakespeare and was influenced by the wonderful sound and look of his plays. Huston had enough sense to see the poet in my writing.

I wrote the first pages of the screenplay, which have never been changed, on the way to Ireland. The opening sequence with Ishmael coming over the hills and down by the waterfalls and streams—that was written on the train and revised on the boat. I finished reading *Moby Dick* on the third day out at about two o'clock in the morning, in the midst of a 90-mile an hour hurricane out on the back deck of the boat.

We met Huston in Paris before we went to London and then on to Dublin. The first thing I said to John was, 'Do we get rid of Fedallah? He's a bore. He's horrible. He's the thing that ruins the whole book. I don't care what the Melville scholars say, he's the extra mystical symbol which breaks the whale's back, and he would be unbearable on the screen.' He said, 'Oh yes, let's pick him up and throw him right overboard.' So, together in our conversation, we grabbed Fedallah and threw him overboard, because we knew if we put him on the screen the picture would never work.

You have to be careful always on the

screen not to overload your circuits, because there's a certain point in any tragedy, high tragedy like this, where people simply will not take what you are giving them. They're going to pull back in their seats and say, 'Oh no, now you've gone too far! Now you're funny!'

I had learned a good lesson which I remembered, because about two or three years earlier O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* had been made into a film at RKO with Rosalind Russell and Kirk Douglas and, I think, Michael Redgrave and Raymond Massey. Very interesting cast. A lot of different qualities. But it didn't work because they put the whole goddamn thing on the screen. And O'Neill never works when you do all of him on the screen because it's too close to you; it's too intimate. You back off just like someone breathing in your face who's had too much onions or garlic the night before. They say, 'Boy, is that real! That's too real!'

You can accept O'Neill on the stage because you are removed from it. Stage is fantasy; film is reality. The stage should never be real. That's why the realistic playwrights really don't work. They pretend they work, but they don't because we don't go to the stage to see what we already know. To hell with that! We go to see things that we *don't* know. See if you can build an illusion there!

The stage is the art of the impossible. Cinema is the art of the possible; it's always the super-real. You've got to be careful when you do any sort of fantasy or anything that's fancy or baroque not to carry it too far because it's right there, shoved right into your eyeballs. That's why someone like Fedallah, when he comes on with his mysticism and astrological signs and all that, can be mildly or completely ridiculous.

I did 20 or 30 outlines trying to understand this book. Then I went to London finally for the last three weeks of work, which turned out to be the best three weeks in the whole six or seven months experience. I got out of bed one morning in London, looked in the mirror and said, 'I am Herman Melville.' On that day I rewrote the last 35 or 40 pages of the screenplay—in just a few hours, seven or eight intense hours of banging away like crazy because I was inspired. I truly was. The ghost of Melville was in me. I ran off across London to Huston's hotel and I threw the script at him. I said, 'There! I think that's it! And he read it and said, 'Jesus Christ, Ray! This is it. This is the way we'll shoot the ending.'

My inspiration was to have Moby Dick take Ahab down and wind him in the coiled ropes and bring him up among the harpoons on this great white bier, this great cortège, this funeral at sea. Then we see, 'My God, these two should be together for ever through eternity, shouldn't they—Ahab and the white whale?' I like to believe, in fact I do believe, that Melville would have approved. I'm proud of that touch. Then the motion of the whale in the sea causes Ahab's hand to beckon the men. They get maddened again and they charge in and are destroyed. Well, it's not in the book.

As a result of that I went back and rewrote some of Elijah's predictions; I went back to the start and said, 'What do we need here that will clarify Elijah's predictions?' I changed that to indicate what will happen



later at the end of the film and then halfway through when Ishmael remembers the predictions. So it all ties up very nicely. Then I had to go through the whole book, of course, and reorder the structure in cinematic terms. Melville gives away a lot of his climaxes too soon for motion picture purposes. It doesn't matter . . . you can do anything in a novel and it will work if you're good enough, but that's not true for films. If you blow your hunt halfway through the film or if you have the encounters with the various ships lined up incorrectly . . . it won't work.

What you want to do is build the tension, build the tension. So I went through and tried to line up all the scenes. I took some sections of the book which were late or which came earlier and I put them in the middle. I took things from the middle and put them towards the end. The encounter with the Rachel, the hurricane, the becalming of the ship—these are all separate entities in the book. I fused them together. I tried to build.

When the man went up and Ahab rededicated the men to the hunt and nailed the coin to the mast—that's a separate incident in the book. Then the man goes up and falls overboard; and that's a separate incident. Now I fused those together so that when he falls overboard, the ship is becalmed. I took that from another section and added that, you see, so that it has meaning. The sea is devouring him. The sea is in a way warning them to turn back from the hunt. Then they are becalmed; that's a separate section, too. I added that. In the middle of that they look at the coin on the mast and say throw it overboard and get us out of here. In the middle of that I put Queequeg's going into his trance. That's another whole section later on in the book. I borrowed that and brought it up so that you get this tight fusion of symbols and ideas and emotions that work. All of these are separate entities in the book; they do not occur that way.

Then I thought to myself, how in hell do you get Queequeg out of his trance? My recollection of it is that he just sort of comes out of it for no reason. My reasoning to Huston was there's only one way to get Queequeg out of that trance: if his most beloved friend is endangered. Death can only counter death. Queequeg is dying in the trance. How can you get him out of that? Well, if someone tries to kill Ishmael, that will bring him out. Only something as violent as that. I added this—it's not in the book. They come up and cut Queequeg, and Ishmael sees it. They have a fight and at the moment when the knife touches Ishmael's throat, Queequeg comes out of his trance and begins to crack the man over his knee to kill him, at which point Moby Dick makes his first appearance. That isn't in the book. Again we have a fusion of images, and they have a first glimpse of this great white thing going off away and they follow.

We have a series of encounters. We've had one encounter with the captain of the Enderby, who is jolly and has lost an arm. The Rachel comes on scene. The calm is over and the Rachel comes looking for her lost children. The captain turns them away. Starbuck says, 'For God's sake, Captain, don't do this. Our name will be a curse in

every seaport of the world, knowing that we haven't helped a man search for his own sons.' They say, 'Turn away,' at which point the hurricane arrives, you see. This is punishment; this is separate in the book and not connected with the Rachel. I fused those two things together.

I'm making a rising line of events here—the Rachel comes into focus, Ahab turns away, God warns him that he shouldn't have done that, he then does a satanic thing, he has the harpoon in his hand which is glowing with St. Elmo's fire. Starbuck tells Ahab that the fire is a warning too. Ahab says, 'No, it lights our way to the whale,' and then he puts out the fire, damps down the fire symbolically. They put up new canvas. The hurricane goes away and they start their final pursuit of Moby Dick. All this doesn't occur in that sequence in the novel.

Then we had to decide what to do about the three lowerings for Moby Dick in the novel. That's too many for the screen. You can't lower three times; people are going to go to sleep on you. So we packed everything into one titanic lowering at the end when the whale is sighted and Elijah's prediction is remembered by Ishmael just before the sighting (which is not in the book). Then they set out and are destroyed.

It was a huge challenge, and I'm very proud of the screenplay. If someone were to ask me what my gift was, it's to make metaphors that are clear and that fuse many dissimilar things together. The longer I live the more I see that this is what I've been doing, but I didn't know I was doing it.

The film's plot is easy to tell. Once you've seen *Moby Dick*, you can go out and tell that screenplay very easily to people—I tried to write a silent screenplay as much as possible, with strong visual images. That gave me enough room here and there to be Shakespearean.

It's interesting . . . after I finished work on this film I discovered, of course, that Melville had been influenced by Shakespeare the same way I had been, except that Melville's influence came late. Melville had rather bad eyesight, and as he was writing *Moby Dick*, someone gave him an edition of Shakespeare with large type. For the first time in his life he read *Lear* and *Othello* and *Hamlet* and fell in love, madly, with Shakespeare. He picked up his whale and threw it away. His first version of *Moby Dick* he threw completely away. He rewrote it in terms of what he learned from Shakespeare.

While I was writing the screenplay I went back to Shakespeare myself and got reinfected with my fevers. His texture is so thick that he's always fresh. You must see Shakespeare dozens of times in your life to begin to hear new things. Then you say, 'I don't remember that line. Was that really in there all the time?' It was, but what happened is that the line before it was so beautiful that you gonged it inside your head; you rang it around in there; you ricocheted it and you savoured it, to change the metaphor. While you're busy savouring it, the next two lines go by you. It's only the next time around that you hear the second line and then the third time around you hear the third line. Most of us don't have the capacity to take in thick poetry

like that, thick, beautiful textures of poetry, all in one fell swoop.

There are three or four long scenes in the film where you have a lot of poetic texture, where we dared to be brave and say a lot—with Ahab and the mild, mild day speech and his rededication of the men and the scene in the cabin where he describes Moby Dick. We've used a combination then of the Shakespearean approach which is sheer language and the cinematic approach which is pure image. It is a pretty good blend. It almost worked. The film is almost magnificent; I wouldn't say it's a failure.

It misses because Peck couldn't bring madness to it. A dear sweet gentleman, but he's not mad. Olivier is a madman to begin with. There's always been that quality of madness there in many things he did. He can call on that madness. Well, Greg Peck is never going to be a paranoid killer or a maniac devourer of whales. He can play in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and make a beautiful film. That's a different quality there.

In some scenes it works. The quiet scene in the cabin where Ahab is awakened from a nightmare and he in very quiet terms madly describes his obsession with Starbuck. That's a good scene because he doesn't have to go too hard with it. If I'd been old enough to advise Huston, which I wasn't (I can look back now and advise him but it's too late), I would have advised him to play the whole thing that way, a quiet madness that's very inner, very intense, so that you don't have to try for the big thing. I think Peck could have carried that off and you'd have had a different kind of Ahab.

I saw in Huston the same confusion I suffered. We were two blind men leading each other. We were way out over our heads and it took six or seven months for me to find myself. Huston had enough sense, at that moment, to say, 'Yes, what you've just done is it.' He didn't know where we wanted to go, and I didn't know. We were hoping somehow to blunder through and we did. John, in other areas, on other kinds of projects, I'm sure can be a great help to people, but we're both children at sea.

Huston tried, God knows, to help me, and when the outlines began to get better he said, 'Yes, yes.' Let's say that he could be a good influence in saying, 'No, that doesn't work. Throw that outline away.' That's very helpful, because sometimes, just out of frustration, you'll latch on to something that's not good because you're tired. You don't want to do any more work. He sent me back again and again until finally these little bits began to add up. I did around 1,200 pages of outlines and screenplay altogether in order to get the 140-150 final pages that became *Moby Dick*.

I think Ahab is the most American character in all our literature. He stands as the American character who says, 'I will deal with the universe on the terms which it presents to me—death, annihilation, mystery, afflictions, paradoxes, evil. I would strike against it.' He works against nature to survive. There are all kinds of ways of approaching nature, and the two halves of our nature are Melville's Ahab on one side and Jules Verne's Nemo on the other. Captain Nemo is the constructive side of a scientific experiment which says I will go with nature instead of striking against it. Find ways of using our blood to cure us.



Ahab is the self-destructive side, the demonic side.

### FAHRENHEIT 451 (1966)

This film has many things in it that are not mine but in truth are extensions of my essence through Truffaut.

After *Moby Dick*, I was offered all the major screenplays for the next three or four years, and I turned them all down. I was offered *War and Peace*, the King Vidor version, which I turned down. I was offered *The Friendly Persuasion*, one of my favourite books, by Jessamyn West. William Wyler was making it, and it turned out to be a very nice film when it was finally made. I was offered *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, I don't quite know why, but I turned that down. I was offered *Les Diaboliques* by Clouzot, and just as well I didn't do it. I don't think I could have done it as well as Clouzot and his collaborator, but it was nice to have him offer me the job.

Charlie Laughton wanted me to do a stage adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451* for him and for Paul Gregory. I spent several months adapting *Fahrenheit* in 1955. It didn't work. I don't know what I did wrong. I'll go back some day and reread the whole

thing. Mr. Laughton was very kind about the whole thing and took me out and got me drunk and told me how bad I was and sent me off into the sunset with tears in my eyes but at least with his love to comfort me. I was learning about the stage through my encounters with Laughton.

François Truffaut had *Fahrenheit* optioned for two or three years before he got the money together. Truffaut said, 'Do you want to do the screenplay?' I said, 'No... I did the novel twice fourteen years ago, two different years, did a short version and a long version, and I spent all that time on the stage version. I think I'm exhausted, even this many years later. I don't think I'd be the right person for you. If I were fresher on it, if I hadn't done the stage play, yes, I would.' So I gave them permission to go off and do it themselves.

I had mixed reactions to the film, of course, but I think it's seventy or seventy-five per cent there; and the more I've seen the film over the years the more I like it. It's haunting, it's touching, it's beautiful, and it does a remarkable thing. All films are the endings of the films. If you don't have a good ending on your picture, you don't have a picture. You can make a brilliant picture and end it badly, and people will come out with this terrible dissatisfaction and say, 'It was good. Wasn't it? I think?'

It's like sex and getting out of bed before the climax and suddenly just walking away.

The sexual image is not far-fetched. Films are closely related to all our other passions and the whole Aristotelian concept of release; what we've picked up from our knowledge of ourselves from the Greeks through all the dramaturgies of time is related to motion pictures. You cannot build the tension and not release it. There are rare exceptions in politicised movies where you want people to go out and do something about a given problem, but those generally fail because they're so self-conscious. You know they're trying to get through to you. They push and you resist that.

The great thing about *Fahrenheit 451* as a film is that it allows you choices; it allows you imagination. That ending is commensurate with the ending of *Citizen Kane*, where you get that total release which comes from the very obvious device of throwing the sled with the name Rosebud on to the fire. It's a simplistic thing. It doesn't really sum up the life of this rich man so completely, but in many ways it does. We need something to say, 'Oh yes, that boy playing in the snow. If he'd only known.' In many ways we want to keep him playing there a little while longer before he goes out to be devoured by the world and himself and circumstance.

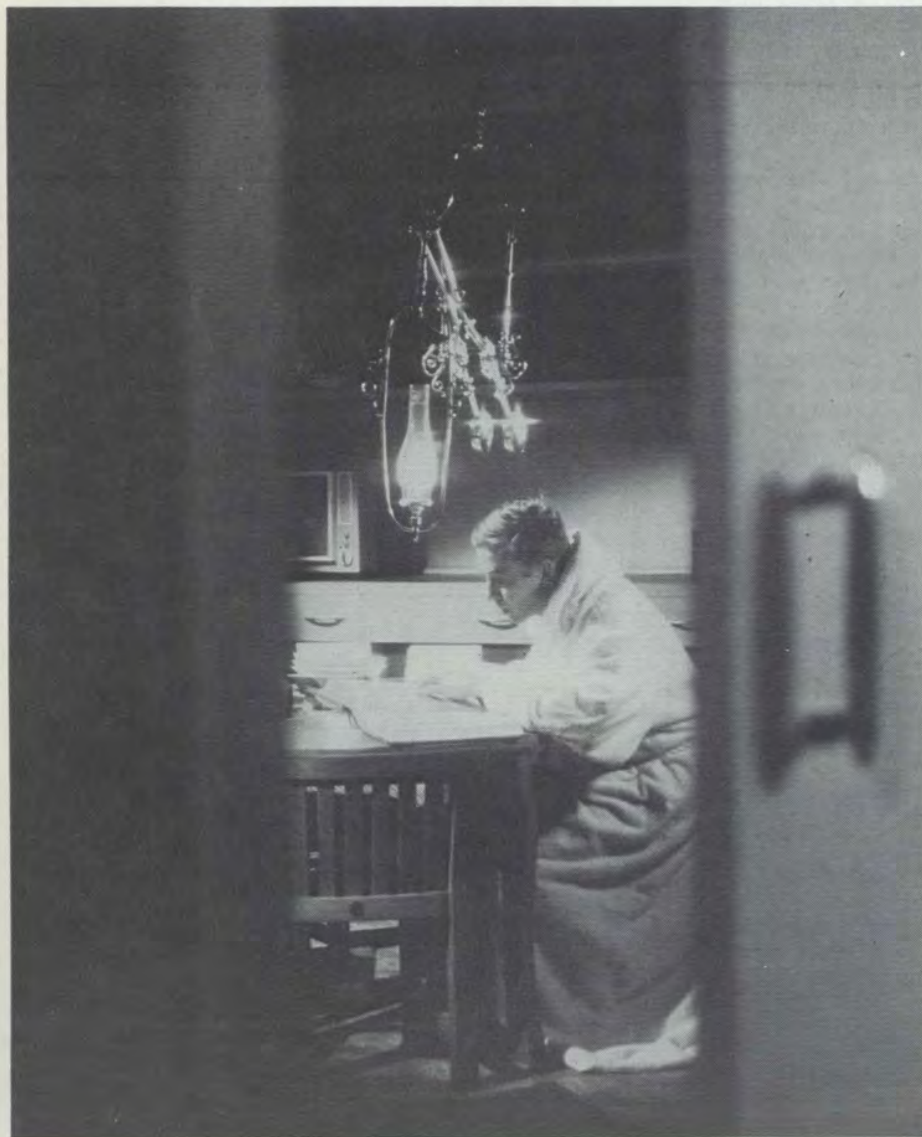
This beautiful ending on Truffaut's film was an accident. It began to snow, and somebody said let's pack up and go back to the studio, but Truffaut had enough brains to say, 'No, let's stay and use the snow. Let it fall.' So you've got that beautiful thing of the old man dying and teaching his son the book. Yes, it's simplistic! Yes, it's ridiculous! Yes, it's romantic! People don't go around speaking books out loud in parts. It's stupid to show all those people doing it, but that's Mankind in that part. It's a supermetaphor. You're not supposed to take a realistic view.

The film is soft in the centre, the scenes with Montag (Oskar Werner) and the schoolteacher, Julie Christie. When they go to the schoolroom, there's something that doesn't quite work there. It's too explanatory where she points out the man dropping the letter or a photograph in the box to turn somebody in. And Montag gets out of the city too easily. You can't get out of a major city running on foot that easily, especially in a time of helicopters and all sorts of devices, like television, that can keep track of you. Truffaut made it too easy and then missed the irony.

There's a wonderful scene in the novel where Montag is running out of the city and he crosses a wide boulevard, almost like the freeway; and all the cars are rushing upon him. One of these cars, full of teenagers, veers to kill him. They don't try to run him down because he's a criminal. They don't know he is Montag. It's gratuitous violence which we've begun to see happening more in our cities, and it's twenty-two years ago that I wrote this book. It's a shame that isn't in the film.

I'm very glad that Truffaut resisted the romance that could have been there with the girl and didn't make a big thing of it. Think of what the theme of the film is, a man falling in love with books. That's a fantastic theme for a film! How dare they

Oskar Werner in 'Fahrenheit 451': '... a great romance about books'





be so intellectual! It's a remarkable thing in which you then have the lovely scene at the end where he says to her, 'We'll see each other again.' And then a minute later, ten seconds later, they're standing outside the house and he turns away and says, 'No, we will never meet again,' something of that sort. They go their separate ways without touching.

Truffaut picked up something that was implicit in my book. I imply that maybe somewhere out in the wilderness the girl was waiting. We're not quite sure in the book whether she was really killed in the street or taken away by the police and incarcerated for being a reader. People who have read *Fahrenheit 451* come to me and say, 'What happened to Clarisse? Why didn't you bring her back?' I say, 'I did that on purpose so that you would want her back, that you'd say to yourself, yes, she's out there somewhere. That glass of milk and the apple waiting at the bottom of a step in a barn where he might be hiding is Clarisse. She'll be there. She puts out the milk for you. She's going to feed you when you need her.'

Truffaut picked up on this and did the direct, realistic thing of actually bringing Clarisse back on scene; but again at one remove, they don't touch. Montag and Clarisse have a little intellectual discussion about books and she tells him who she is and he says who he is. He's Poe. And then you have the old man dying and you pull away in the snow and all these people wandering. *Fahrenheit 451* is a great romance about books.



'The Illustrated Man': Rod Steiger

### THE ILLUSTRATED MAN (1969)

The part of the film that does work is the framework . . . That's the beauty of the film and it almost saves it, but it cannot because you've got to have more than a framework.

*The Illustrated Man* is fifty per cent disaster. Some parts of it are so incredibly bad that I can't believe it. The photography is lovely; it has a lovely look. The score by Jerry Goldsmith is, I think, very fine. I like the cast: Rod Steiger and Claire Bloom. But the film needed cutting. The climaxes

were too early. They blew the development by starting in the middle of the story *The Veldt* instead of at the beginning. All you've got to do is read the short story to know where to start. They started in the middle. You're suddenly out in the middle of the veldt. There's no suspense that way.

The set for the house and the veldt was quite beautiful. I said to the director Jack Smight, 'For God's sake, you've got all this beautiful scenery here. Use it!' The house is the villain. The subconscious is the villain, but it is visibly on display through the house. These are people who have spent a lot of money and time on appurtenances, on machines, on the dwelling, on the things they think are important. The children are secondary. They're not really villainous people, but they got locked into it as we all do on occasion with our machines and our houses and our things that really don't count for anything.

I said, 'Now that you've got this beautiful set and these hallways and the veldt, put a scene in the film here which you can shoot in two or three hours where the camera prowls the house like a cat late at night and everything's asleep. You peer in at the various rooms and the husband and wife are asleep there. Then you move your camera down the hall and you look in at the children. They may be lying there with their eyes open. You move back out again. You look at all the machines that are ticking and purring under their breath. Then you go down the hall and in through the door of the nursery and the animals are still in there. They haven't gone away; they're waiting in the dark. The vultures are sitting in the trees and you hear these lonely night sounds. You pull your camera away and that's the end of a whole scene where you've spooked the audience . . . with the house! Do it!' They never did it.

Then, of course, the last story . . . I don't even know why they bought it from me, because the story they did for *Last Night of the World* has nothing to do with my short story. Theirs is a complete change and switch. I believe Steiger wrote some of that in order to save it.

The part of the film that does work is the *Illustrated Man* and the witch and the boy. There are some good possibilities there. The encounter with the witch and being tattooed and the witch disappearing in the house—it's all very lovely and touching.

### SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

(In progress)

The problem with the film of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is getting financing. Here are the two of us together, Sam Peckinpah and I, and you'd think that automatically if we showed up on a studio doorstep and said, 'Hey! Here we are, the Gold Dust Twins!' that they would hire us immediately. That's not true. As big a name as Sam Peckinpah is in the world and as large as I am in my own field, you'd think that it would work out, but we still haven't settled it in the studio.

The first meeting, the first minute when Peckinpah came to the lunch table a year



'The Illustrated Man'

and a half ago out in the Valley—he shook my hand and he said, 'We're going to shoot the book.' I said, 'Do you really mean it? Don't say that unless you're going to do it.' He says, 'We're going to shoot everything. We're going to rip the goddamn pages out one by one and shoot them because it's all there. All you have to do is trim it down a little. The novel's long. We can't shoot the whole thing. But the essence of each page we'll shoot.' Naturally, he won me right over.

I think he means it and that's the way I'm trying to do the screenplay, so that I can get the essence of each page and say, well, what am I saying here? How much can I leave out and still say it? I'm trimming as I go; I'm going to have a long screenplay, probably 200 pages. Then we'll have to trim that some more and get it down to 150 pages which will still be a very long movie, two and a half hours, I'm sure. If the weight carries, you go with it.

*Moby Dick* is the right length—it's two hours—because that's the length it should have been. It couldn't be any shorter; there's nothing you can cut in *Moby Dick*. There are things you can reshoot to make them better, if we had the ability to do so, but there's no way to cut that film. Everything there . . . it's very lean.

People have expressed doubt about a film-maker as violent as Peckinpah directing my work. I say, 'Well, no. You haven't seen all his films.' *Junior Bonner* is a much quieter film and very tender. It's a film that Peckinpah deeply wanted to do. Regardless of what your final analysis of the film is, he wanted to do that and he did it the way he intended to do it.

*Straw Dogs* is an incredible film that makes a very strong point and makes it very well and makes it very morally. It's not gratuitous violence. It's finally that magical moment in time for all of us where we're sore put upon by the universe and people. You don't side with the villains; you've got to side with the put-upon hero who says, 'Hey, cut it out! I haven't done anything to you. Don't do that!'

Anyway, I'm looking forward to the experience of working with Peckinpah on *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. With luck we could hunt locations and start shooting next October 1\*. I hope so. Time's running out . . . for all of us. There are a few things I'd like to see done before it's too late.

\*This would have been October, 1973. Production has not yet started, but Ray Bradbury is at present completing the script for Fox and Sam Peckinpah is still 'number one director for the project.'



# FROM MURNAU TO MUNICH

NEW GERMAN  
CINEMA

David L. Overbey



Syberberg's *Ludwig II: Requiem for a Virgin King*

At the least conservative estimate, from about 1914 to 1933 (using the year in which Fritz Lang left Germany as a reference point), the 'classic age' of German cinema comprised approximately 150 feature films—less than ten films of quality a year. With this figure as a guide, one can hardly argue that a new 'golden age' of German film has been born. Yet, from the twenty or so films screened at the Sorrento German Film Encounter towards the end of last year, one can conclude that, almost in spite of the dreadful international distribution system for West German films, something worth notice is indeed happening in Munich and Berlin. This is particularly surprising given the almost impossible conditions of financing and distribution under which most younger German directors must work.

The majority of films produced in West Germany are financed with television money, and may not play in cinemas until they have been televised twice. With few exceptions, directors of quality find it impossible to work at all save within the strict 'artistic' limitations of television. Consequently, such films as Herzog's *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* and Reinhard Hauff's *Mathias Kneissl* were televised—thus losing much of their pictorial and narrative power—and then were released to a few cinemas where they played briefly to near-empty houses. How the demands of television production can play havoc with a

director's original concept can easily be illustrated by Bernhard Wicki's *The False Weight*. Although Wicki is nobody's idea of a major or avant-garde director, he has in the past turned out efficient entertainments. With his latest film, however, the narrative dragged and the structure was repetitive. When asked about this, Wicki explained that the film was at least a third again as long as he had planned, because it was to be shown in two long instalments on German television.

Most German directors are optimistic, however, about new legislation (partially drafted and strongly championed by Alex-

ander Kluge), which they hope will reverse this stultifying process: state television money would still be used for production, but the director would have control over form and content, with the film playing cinemas first and being televised two years later. Obviously an increase in cinema attendance and a fuller distribution pattern will mean a more healthy production atmosphere, and might well aid the more serious directors.

Not that the German film seems directionless. Indeed, one danger of seeing any group of recent films within a setting of national cinema is that one tends to look for—and perhaps even to create—national trends. This was seemingly as true for the directors involved in the Encounter as for the critics. Maximilian Schell, for example, described the films being screened as a 'new movement' in the German cinema. While this was evidently a matter of Schell being momentarily carried away by enthusiasm, he was none the less pressed for a more specific description of the 'movement'. Wishing to pay homage both to his Italian hosts and to Germany's own cinematic past, he ended by stammering that it might be called 'neo-realistic expressionism'. Even given the shifting and often vague definitions of those terms, one would be hard pressed to fit any of the recent German product into either of these categories.

None the less, there are similarities in subject and in form among a number of the films. There is, for example, a concern both with the past as it reflects and illuminates the present social fabric and with individual isolation when that fabric begins to rip apart. This is particularly true of the Munich group of directors, writers and actors, who are involved in one another's projects to such a degree that it would be strange were some sort of cross-fertilisation of ideas and creative energies not present. One must, of course, be careful here, for creative friendships and common concerns do not necessarily mean a 'school' of filmmaking—any more than the same sorts of friendships and concerns could have led one to confuse the films of Godard with those of Chabrol or Truffaut during the early days of the French new wave.

Alexander Kluge, for example, directed and wrote *The Fortuitous Employments of a Slave* and co-authored the script of Edgar Reitz's *Trip to Vienna*; but while both films concern women in society at crucial times in their lives, they remain quite different in approach, style and quality. Reitz's film, for all its promising narrative concept in which we follow two 'good time' girls on a pleasure trip that turns into a nightmare during the last days of World War II, remains a film of surfaces, in which Reitz's gliding colour camera distances us from his girls just when we should move ever closer. The film is never less than entertaining, but it is also never more. Were it not for the promise of its basic idea of paralleling the crumbling of social and personal illusions, there would be nothing to set it apart from the *cinéma du papa* of Wicki's *False Weight*, in which public corruption and erotic



obsession are mixed in a heavily coloured postcard re-creation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In an unusual declaration by any festival organiser, Gian Luigi Rondi said that he considered *Fortuitous Employments of a Slave* 'the most important film in the Encounter.' While one might have strong reservations about the use of the superlative, there can be no quarrel with the fact of Kluge's talent and intelligence. Kluge is perhaps more 'original' for German cinema than he seems when placed in a more international framework. It is certainly not to take away from his achievement to suggest that he learned a good deal from Godard of the period of *Masculin Féminin*, particularly in his fragmented narrative, printed quotations, references to older films, and nervously hand-held images. Nevertheless, Kluge is his own man in the uses to which he puts these inherited devices and in his approach to life and to the cinema itself. He is less romantic but more respectful in his view of women (and not merely because he uses his sister as actress as opposed to Godard's use of Karina). He is also more intelligently analytical of society and less nostalgic in his use of earlier cinema. Never a true 'film buff' in the Godard fashion, Kluge came to the medium as an assistant to Fritz Lang in 1958 only after having been a lawyer, with published works on law, society and various scientific subjects.



Alexandra Kluge in 'The Fortuitous Employments of a Slave'

His main character in this film, Roswitha Bronski (Alexandra Kluge), is an abortionist in order to support her family while her husband continues to do chemical research at a university. When the police close her clinic and her husband is forced to take a job with a big chemical company, she begins to examine for the first time what she has been doing with her life as wife, mother and abortionist. At first comic in her grasping for whatever 'good works' she can find, she realises that she is almost helpless as an individual to change the world about her; and as a woman she is rarely taken seriously, even by her husband. Her aimless social activity finally finds a focus as she gathers evidence and then exposes a plan to cheat the workers of the chemical company. Although she gets her husband fired, any more positive results from her activities are left ambiguous; it seems enough for Kluge to trace the coming of age and to consciousness of a former 'slave'. Any summary of plot, of course, cannot indicate the sheer energy and informing intelligence of the film, nor the joy of Alexandra Kluge's unfettered performance.

*A Strong Flight Out*, by Michael Verhoeven, also has a woman at its centre, one less intelligent and more trodden upon by various aspects of institutionalised society—from church to mental hospital. But the film lacks the verve and power of either Kluge's film or even of Verhoeven's earlier fictional-documentary *O.K.*, perhaps because he attempts to hit too many targets within the framework of a cold case history. The same objections can also be levelled against Norbert Kückelmann's *The Experts*, in which a young clerk-lawyer is caught up in a labyrinth of courts and mental hospitals. Although Kückelmann often has an eye for telling detail, he suffers a final failure of imagination after enmeshing his protagonist in the clutches of society's 'experts', and ends his film with a most unconvincing murder. Neither director has been able to make the material his own—a fact which is measurable by the singular interchangeability of the indifferent images of both films.

Two more directors of the Munich group, Reinhard Hauff and Volker Schlöndorff, turn up in the casts of each other's films (as do director Rainer Werner Fassbinder and scenarists Martin Sperr and Margarethe von Trotta). There are other, more important similarities, since both have chosen to set their stories of the struggles of the poor against an oppressive establishment in the setting of early nineteenth century Germany. Hauff, the more romantic of the two, chose a well known historical story of the hero-bandit, *Mathias Kneissl*. The film's glowing antique colour, strong sense of period atmosphere and slow, graceful narrative movement, in which Mathias develops from a member of an oppressed family and class to a hunted and often betrayed folk hero, all bathe Hauff's tale in a romanticism which engages our non-social emotions rather more than it activates our intellects. Still, intelligent and well made popular entertainments are not so currently common that we can easily dismiss Hauff's work.

Volker Schlöndorff's *The Sudden Riches of the Poor People of Kombach* has received international attention and distribution, no matter on how limited a scale. Although set in 1821, it deliberately avoids the creation of a romantic-mythic past. The protagonists are a group of unappealing farmers whose poverty drives them to a daring robbery of a royal pay wagon. There is nothing heroic about the group as they betray one another and themselves, finally to embrace society's view of them as common criminals before they are executed. The film's power partially derives from this very refusal to glamorise the oppressed, at the same time that sympathy and understanding are extended to them. This emphasis on one sort of realism, however, does not mean the film is any less visually stunning than Hauff's romantic colour film—particularly in those sequences in which men hide in the sunlit dappled floor of the forest or in the drifting fog, waiting for the phantom-like horse-drawn wagon to fulfil their dreams of sudden riches and freedom.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that, as Fritz Lang once put it, 'even directors must eat,' for Schlöndorff's newer film is clearly a bread-and-sausages assignment with which the director never felt comfortable. It is not that the subject of *The Moral of Ruth*

*Halbfass* is impossible; from such triangles of middle-class adultery have come several of Chabrol's finest films. Nor is the film without intelligence: Schlöndorff's cool observation of middle-class mores often has a satiric thrust, albeit mostly blunted. Nevertheless, the confusion of intent, the banality of conception of character and action embodied in the script, coupled with the intractable woodenness of the star Senta Berger, all go to make one finally a little sad at the waste of a good director's talents. (Happily, Schlöndorff has since returned to form with *Straw Fire*, made for TV and starring his wife, Margarethe von Trotta, as a divorcee looking for liberation; another *Slave* story, less political than Kluge's.)

Although neither is as successful as *Poor People of Kombach*, two films presented more directly the workers' struggles in contemporary situations. Christian Ziewer's *Dear Mother, I'm Doing Fine* resembles the Godard/Gorin *Tout Va Bien*—a 'co-operative creative venture' in which real workers mix with actors in the cast to dramatise their problems. It was produced for and then refused by television; and it was only after repeated showings in factories and schools that enough pressure was finally developed for the film to be televised. Doubtless its indifferently composed and static images look better on the small screen, but one cannot excuse in the same way the reduction of the characters, who sit about and mouth interminable slogans about real problems.

*La Victoria* is a different matter, simply because Peter Lilienthal chose to dramatise the struggle of the poor in pre-Allende Chile, so that even when the characters hold meetings in which slogans are a major part of the dialogue, the slogans are given immediacy by concrete images of oppression and abominable living conditions. Even the awkwardness of the cast—consisting of 'real' people re-enacting events in their lives—works with the movement of the film, for Lilienthal has a pervasive sense of atmosphere that allows the characters to become an organic part of the streets and houses he uses for locations. Not as powerful a film as Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* from Angola, *La Victoria* is moving, and at the very least avoids most of the pitfalls which leave many makers of political films talking to themselves in empty cinemas.

Although contemporary problems of German society itself were never entirely absent from the Sorrento screen, only two of the films chose to confront the issues of the present in terms of the immediate (Nazi) past. While Kluge used Marxist quotations to indicate that the bourgeois concept of the family has disintegrated, his real interest was elsewhere. Peter Fleischmann, however, in *The Bells of Silesia*, which was greeted with indifference in Germany, takes as his entire subject the breakdown of the middle-class family—representing the values of the recent nationalistic past—and the emergence of a new generation of Germans. The charges of confused concept and rambling structure which have generally greeted the film are probably valid enough, although one could make a case for its loose and seemingly disunified style as a correlative to the nearly formless response of the new Germany to the old. Still, the film is always interesting and vital, and often





Maximilian Schell's 'The Pedestrian'

marvellously funny in its satiric jabs at both sides of the generation/ideological gap. If the film is not always as strong and moving as Fleischmann's previous *Hunting Scenes from Bavaria*, it in no way betrays that first promise.

*The Pedestrian*, by Maximilian Schell, is less bitter and certainly more 'formal' than Fleischmann's film. Told in humanistic rather than agit-prop terms, it offers us a war criminal as Everyman, a man changed from what he was and haunted by what he had done. There is no apology here—the massacre of a Greek village is shown in all its horror and is unequivocally condemned—but it is also fully argued that to be a man is to be many things, and that one man may well have paid the fullest price in the present for his acts in the past. Although Schell mentioned Ozu as a major influence on his work, one sees less of that contemplative stillness and much more of the active investigatory ambiguity of Welles' *Citizen Kane* and *Confidential Report*.

Schell is, of course, well known as an actor, which has helped in drawing international attention to his first two films as a director. Not many young German directors are as fortunate. There are, however, at least five who have already gained reputations outside Germany. While Straub was not represented at the Sorrento instead of his more recent *Willow Springs* (Fassbinder was represented by his 1972 Berlin Festival film, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*), it seemed not to matter, since the method, if not the ostensible subject, remains unchanged: a stationary camera and single set-up, with characters moving slowly in front of the lens to a semi-synchronised soundtrack of classical themes. Whether one is elevated to a state of ecstasy or bored beyond redemption seems to be less a matter of taste than of temperament, and the ability to enter the contemplative (static?) world of the director almost a matter of patience (endurance?). There is nothing in *Salome* (which derives more from Nazimova

than from Wilde or Strauss) which will change anyone's mind about the director. Both admirers and detractors will see in the film exactly what they have seen before.

Werner Herzog's *Even Dwarfs Started Small* is also widely known outside Germany, which made it a puzzling choice for inclusion in the Encounter over his more recent *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*. Whatever the Herzog film, however, it is always a pleasure to watch an undoubted major talent as it moves through and dominates wide-ranging subject matter. Whether in the nearly closed world of the blind and deaf in *Land of Light and Shadows*, in the growing evil and apocalyptic violence of the dwarfs, or in the obsessive religious/political madness of *Aguirre*, Herzog's glidingly smooth movement and seemingly casual objective positioning of camera accurately defines and establishes the limits of human isolation. Even the problems of the impossible English dubbing of *Aguirre*, or the original German version of *Dwarfs*, shown with Spanish subtitles to the mostly Italian audience at Sorrento, could not dim the power of Herzog's achievement.

Even with the screening of the Herzog picture, however, the most original and successful of recent films from Germany must certainly be Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Ludwig II: Requiem for a Virgin King*. Although Syberberg has so far directed eight films, this is the first to be released internationally. Indeed, it was the 'sleeper' of 1973 in Paris—surprising and delighting not only the film's admirers but its director and producer as well, for it could hardly have been thought of as a 'popular' piece. The adjective 'Brechtian', employed to describe any sort of theatrical or cinematic device which distances the dramatic reality from the spectator, is over-used and rarely accurate. In *Ludwig II*, however, there is a good deal of that special sort of alienation, from Syberberg's use of stylised backdrops to his constant reminders that we are watching actors partake in something of a charade, suggesting thereby that the artificial charade on the screen is not far removed from the supposedly more real charades of history. Perhaps part of *Ludwig's* popularity is that it is quite funny, with each satiric arrow—whether directed at fascism or at Visconti's visually beautiful but increasingly static pageants—accurately hitting its target. Nor, for all its 'intellectual style', is this another example of the rather arid cinema of the Schroeter/Fassbinder school. Syberberg's work is affecting even while we laugh. For example: as Ludwig, at the end of his reign, attempts to sing, breaking into a hilarious yodel, Syberberg moves his camera ever closer, so that we are all at once looking at the pain and madness in the young king's eyes—a moment perhaps only equalled in the modern German cinema by Herzog himself in the final glorious series of swooping and turning tracking shots around the solitary mad Aguirre.

After the films of Herzog, Syberberg, Kluge and Schell, it is particularly disheartening to see a sampling of the more common 'commercial' German cinema. Franz Peter Wirth's *Oh, Jonathan, Oh, Jonathan* and Alfred Weidenmann's *Aber Johnny*, for example, are the sort of unfunny 'sex comedies' which nearly drove 20th-

Century-Fox to bankruptcy in the Hollywood of the late 1950s. *Night Shadows* of Niklaus Schilling was highly touted as 'the most beautiful phantom film since Murnau', but is neither beautiful nor, with its plodding tale of dull guilt, really even a 'phantom film'. It is probably superfluous to note that it has nothing to do with anything connected with Murnau.

This insistence on a connection to Murnau, however, is interesting, in that a yearning backwards to the 'golden age' seemed to hang over Sorrento. One could hear everywhere the names of Pabst and Murnau; Maximilian Schell invoked the 'tradition of expressionism'. Fritz Lang was very much present in spirit, as he was awarded a special Golden Siren for his work. There was an extensive retrospective of the German films of Ernst Lubitsch. It did not seem a harkening back in the American fashion, a nostalgic attempt to recreate films and modes of a supposedly less complicated time, nor a rediscovery of a neglected cinematic past. Instead, this insistence on the days of UFA seemed like an almost superstitious evocation of clear previous achievement to buoy up the uncertainty of the results of present labour.

If, then, its purpose was in part to cement the belief in a past of consistent and unequalled excellence in the national cinema, the Lubitsch retrospective may have been something of a mistake. It might well have been better to choose the films of Lang or Murnau, for the German films of Lubitsch represent the most uneven and uninteresting work of any major director of the 'classic' period. The most frequent criticism of *The Haunted Screen* by Lotte H. Eisner is that she was 'too hard on Lubitsch' when she suggested that he was not a first-rate director in Germany. Yet, after seeing the early films as a group, one comes away wondering why Mille Eisner was not still harder.



Lubitsch's 'Sumurun'

It is not that the films are thoroughly bad. From time to time there are shots or sequences which are graceful in the remarkable chiaroscuro lighting supposedly learned from Max Reinhardt. In *Die Auserwählte* there is a marvellously funny sequence involving the boredom of waiting and an intricate floor design, but for the most part the comedies are lumpen and heavy-handed, obvious and witless. The exotic tales, like *Die Augen der Mumie Ma* and *Sumurun*, lack a sense of magic. What





# LEACOCK AT M.I.T.

Louis Marcorelles



Leacock on 'Louisiana Story' (1948); and with his son, Robert, in the 1960s

Richard Leacock made his first film, *Canary Bananas*, at the age of thirteen. Born in 1921, he grew up in the Canary Islands, where his British family had a banana plantation, and in 1938 went to the United States to study at Harvard. He graduated in physics in 1943, and then became a war cameraman with the American army. In 1948, Leacock was cameraman on Flaherty's *Louisiana Story*.

In 1955 he met Robert Drew, a journalist working for *Life* magazine. Together they developed the idea of a new form of screen journalism of which an essential ingredient was sync sound and the use of what was then light-weight equipment. The Drew-Leacock-Pennebaker films of the early 1960s—including *Primary*, about the primary campaign in which Senator Hubert Humphrey stood against the future President John F. Kennedy, *Football*, *Jane* (Jane Fonda), *The Chair*, etc.—played a big part in the movement towards *cinéma vérité*, or direct cinema.

These 16mm. films achieved great prestige and almost no distribution, in the United States or overseas; and as Leacock says in this interview, he was brought to something of a standstill. In 1969 he was offered the job of running the film department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) in Cambridge. Here Leacock and his team have been working on the development of new ultra light-weight equipment, bringing together recent technical innovations (super 8, video and cassettes). Increasingly, Leacock sees the future of film as lying outside the cinemas.

RICHARD LEACOCK: When we made the 16mm. breakthrough—we designed the equipment, as you know, to make a certain kind of film-making possible—there were two things that didn't happen. One was solving the problem of distribution: there is no way that we have been able to break through with the kind of film-making we like to do, and none of the Drew films ever got any proper screenings anywhere. The distribution problem is exactly the same today, and it has led to a peculiar attitude on my own part. If I go out and shoot a film now, I have a terrible tendency not to bother finishing it. It was two years before I finished *Queen of Apollo*. Why trouble to finish it, if there is no way to get it to people? And it's expensive: this film is not paid for by an organisation, the money comes out of my own pocket, and even though it's a cheap film, it's still two thousand dollars. It's like throwing away an automobile.

As to my interest in super 8 . . . well, the main problem was the cost of equipment, and the fact that you had to be in business to own this equipment. The cost of the camera and tape-recorder, the kind of equipment that people like the Maysles use, ends up at about twelve thousand dollars. It's a great deal of money, and one result is that the only people who can really make films are people living in the business of making films. This seems wrong to me . . . quite apart from the fact that the equipment is too heavy and too clumsy. I constantly find myself in situations where I say, 'Oh God, I wish I could film now.' But when you are taking twelve thousand dollars worth of equipment about with you, you don't do it unless you have a contract signed. So there is no way of making sort of easy-going films. People who are absolute fanatics can try it, but most of the people who really do go out like this and make films are still making silent films. Mekas takes his camera with him. Stan Brakhage takes his camera with him. But they are back in the old days, perhaps by choice. I want at least the possibility of sync sound for the kind of things I want to do.

I got involved in teaching mostly because I am unemployable in the professional world. I spent four years at Leacock-Pennebaker doing nothing very much. The networks don't want to deal with me, nor do the educational TV people. So I had come to a standstill when about four years ago M.I.T. asked me to come and teach. I was very dubious about this because I felt that the film schools as I knew them are rather playing games. They have a little bit of equipment and they play at film-making—most of the schools give people little silent cameras and tell them to go out and be creative. When I talked to Gerald Wiesner, who was then provost of M.I.T. and is now president, I said that to me the whole idea of a university is that the people who are most advanced in any subject are dealing with it there in the most advanced ways. This is what a university should be. You don't have a university teaching nothing but Newtonian physics; that would be ridiculous. And yet in films, in most of the places, they were still teaching essentially silent film-making. Wiesner said, 'Well, suppose we get a limited amount of new equipment, so that you are dealing with the most



advanced state of the art at the moment. And then you have two roles: one is teaching film-making as we know it, and the other is research . . . ' In other words, he was asking me at the beginning what a place like M.I.T. could contribute to the art of film-making. And that seemed a totally different idea.

We set out to make equipment that universities at least would be able to afford. Much, much cheaper . . . The only way to make the system cheap would be to take mass produced elements, mass produced super 8 cameras, mass produced cassette recorders, etc., all the way down the line, and adapt them to do what they were never intended to do. And that's exactly what we have done. Most of the credit for that must go to John Rosenfeld and the people working with him. The really creative part took a little over a year, figuring out how to do it. And it has taken another year or more to finish up the details. And then we went to a small but very sophisticated manufacturing company and worked with their people on the final marketable result.

In doing this, I started out thinking in terms of rather traditional film-making, but during this period the video cassettes came into existence. I've never liked projectors—they're noisy, they're always going wrong, nobody wants to set up a projector in a living room after dinner, put up screens and turn out all the lights. It's much nicer simply to slip a cassette into a little machine and sit by your television set. So this is the way we have been going.

The other thing against film-making is that it's such a nuisance: there's so much hassle involved. You get your film developed, you edit it, you get your work print, you edge number the work print, you conform the original to the edited film, you send it to the lab, you go through a lot of adjustments, then you have a master made, and from the master you make more prints . . . It all goes on for months and months; and I don't want to be involved with all that.

So what I do now is that you shoot your film, you edit the original, taking care not to scratch it, and then you transfer directly to videotape. And from there you can make all the adjustments you want. You edit with film and then transfer to tape, and you can do special effects, colour corrections, anything you like. In our case we use super 8 film and transfer to  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cassette tape. The whole hour of colour film is in a little box.

#### What about the sound problem?

There is no difference from 16mm. You record your original sound on a cassette, then it's transferred to super 8 full coat magnetic film, and the machine that is used to do that is originally a quarter-inch tape recorder. Then you edit: the table is clearly a cheap copy of a Steenbeck, and it does everything that a Steenbeck will do. There really is no difference. After a few days of working in super 8, I don't find it any more difficult than working in 16mm. You just have to be a little more careful. And then you play it back on your projector and go straight into a video system. Or you can stay with film if you like. Personally I find 35mm. grotesque; it's so big and clumsy.

**Is your rig a commercial proposition? Apart from sales to individuals who can afford it and want to make their own films, could you use it commercially for TV or to make films for cinema showing?**

No, not for cinemas. The limit for the screen, with super 8, is about ten feet wide. But as far as I am concerned, the theatre is more or less dead. People talk about the big screen; and while they are talking about it, they are making smaller and smaller theatres with smaller and smaller screens. Because that is economical . . . It's a dying thing. And my films have never been shown in theatres anyway, so the big screen doesn't exist for me. People like us are really talking about a very low density audience. It's boring to keep saying the same thing, but it's true: if you live in a small town in America and happen to want to read a book by Malraux, you can do it, there's no problem, even if you are the only person in that town who wants to read it. You simply buy the book. The same thing with records, which can also reach a small, thinly dispersed audience. But there is no way for you to see a movie, with this technology. Cassettes are still expensive, but within a few years the machines will get much cheaper, and there will have to be some sort of library system for distributing the tapes. And within a year or two we will have the video-disc, just like a record, with forty minutes of colour on each side. And this will be something

*Shots from 'Football' (1961)*



that can be mass produced. So we enter into the possibility for the first time . . .

I remember how Flaherty used to dream of an audience who could see what they wanted, where they wanted, when they wanted. This will be the first time for any sort of movie, and it is going to make a really profound change. I have been wrong before: I thought television would make a profound change and it did make one, in the wrong direction. It almost annihilated the individual film-maker. I realise that when you solve one problem you create another one. But I still think that this is going to be possible.

**Could you describe the machinery more specifically? How many pieces in the rig, and how much does it cost?**

There is a perfectly ordinary standard mass produced camera. It happens to be a Nizo, next week we might adapt another kind of camera. It's put into a box to keep it quiet, and it has a crystal control which makes sure that it's exactly 24 frames per second. The tape-recorder is an ordinary cassette recorder: it happens to be a Sony, but we could use any other kind. Again it has a crystal control, so that the reference track is laid on the tape as it's recording. It's very precise. The transfer machine, the transfer from the cassette to the super 8 sprocketed sound film, is at the moment a Tanberg, taking  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch tape, which is modified and has a sensing device that comes to the sprocket holes. And that is fed into a black box which tells the recorder how to speed up or slow down, in relation to the reference signal on the cassette tape. The editing table, as I said, is like a Steenbeck. And the projector is designed so that it's compatible with a video camera, so that you don't get any flicker when you go to videotape. The whole package at this point costs \$7,500. The editing table costs about \$5,000. We would like to make it cheaper, and if the market is as big as I think it is, it will get cheaper.

So far we have delivered about twenty units: all experiments to start with. Certain schools are using it, and clearly it's useful in schools. Is it practical? Is it cheap enough? Is it too complicated? We have to find all this out. The National Endowment of the Arts has bought four systems, which they have placed in educational TV stations in South Carolina, Pittsburgh, Dallas and Seattle. They also paid for a resident film-maker for a year to see what they can do for educational television. None of the networks has been interested so far. That's their problem. The Indian government is interested, in relation to family planning problems in India, and the use of television. They are thinking of going to super 8, so they have bought one to see what they can do with it. In the next year we should find out how useful it is.

**At the beginning you seem to have hoped for something that would make it possible for anyone to make a film, just as anyone can write a book. But we still have to take into account the relatively high cost, and the fact that this is equipment for professionals.**

We want to design something cheaper, for more people. But it would be possible for many people now to own a camera and a tape-recorder. The rest of the equipment can be either institutional or owned by groups. But one thing I have learned about



film-making is that a movie is a lot of work, it's not something you do lightly. Almost everyone owns a typewriter; very few people write books. So I am thinking first of the professional user, but a different kind of professional. At the moment, people invest a great deal of money in equipment, and become professional film-makers. In general there will always be such people, but I don't think that this is the ideal condition. What I'm really aiming at is professionals in a different sense, people who have a view of the world, people who need to communicate rather than people who earn a living in communications. And my hope is that they will now be able to use this equipment.

**You are thinking now more in terms of television than of film . . .**

I am thinking of looking at it on a TV set, but that has nothing to do with television as we know it. I happen not to like projectors. But other people do, so fine; they can go either way.

**There could be a problem the day the half-inch Sony or any other equipment could use colour to shoot. It could limit the appeal of your machine.**

I don't think so. There are considerable problems about doing really sophisticated editing in video, and although it's perfectly possible to solve them, the machinery is very, very expensive. And there is a portability problem: even the half-inch Sony is a very clumsy recording device to carry around, and with colour I think it will be even more so. All these things are shifting, but for the moment half-inch video doesn't satisfy what I want to do with films. It satisfies what I want to do with half-inch video. They are suited to different things.

**When you were working in 16mm., you could imagine that those films might some day be blown up to 35mm. and shown in normal theatres . . .**

I have never in my life, except for *Louisiana Story*, worked on a film shown in the theatres. So who cares? I don't want to make theatre films, and I don't even go to the cinema. I go perhaps three times a year. I find the whole experience unpleasant, and I find what I see there mostly unbelievable pompous nonsense. I can't deal with that audience.

**Except that television isn't free. You have either the big networks or the state systems . . .**

It's completely an instrument of the establishment. Film-making is expensive, and to the extent that it's expensive it's an arm of the establishment. Of course, I don't know how you get rid of this, and it's just as true of revolutionary countries as of capitalist countries. In Cuba film-making is an instrument of the establishment. I don't care what sort of government you have: whoever controls the money controls what is done with it. I think this can only change by making things cheaper; but, you know, there is a limit to how cheap you can make it.

**For you, this whole business of super 8 is a development of your first efforts with Flaherty, and then with 16mm?**

Yes, and now we want to get into the mixture of video and film. That will be the first stage. Perhaps eventually it will be all video, but that's fine. Whatever does it most easily is the best. But I see a danger with video in that the facilities I know about, the

sophisticated ones, tend to be run by engineers. And I don't like that . . . Suppose you do your own televising with a video camera. Then you need to do some really intricate editing, and you have to go to a facility that is run by engineers. You can tell them what to do, but you can't do it yourself. OK, they let you twist the knobs . . .

**When you began working with Drew, you put a lot of emphasis on sound. And when you were shooting with the big cameras they were still heavy, twenty pounds or so. Now you're shooting with a very light camera, weighing about four pounds. What is the difference for you? Do you feel at all ill at ease, as a professional?**

I love it. I won't change the camera . . . Just to show the difference: when we made *Primary*, we shot for five days, chasing Kennedy and Humphrey around, and at the end of that five days we were all literally incapable of standing up. We could not

who taught with me at M.I.T., is doing it, but you are very limited. It opens up a certain area but it also closes off a whole area. You are not so mobile. I've noticed in what little of Pincus' shooting I have seen that he is stuck with one person all the time. He can only really film one person, or two.

**It goes along with your idea of the short girl taking the sound with a little microphone . . .**

That was just a joke, but whoever takes the sound has to work much closer to the people they are filming, so you need someone who doesn't threaten them. It varies according to who you're filming. If I went into the ku-klux-klan, or a group of police chiefs, with a short girl, that would threaten them. So I went there with a six-foot-three ex-marine, with a Southern accent. He didn't frighten them. On the other hand, with Stravinsky I worked with



*'Primary' (1960): the Kennedys on campaign*

longer drive, we were so physically exhausted. I remember how we all went to sleep in a room, on the floor: it looked like old dirty laundry lying around. In 1972 I did a film with the governor of Puerto Rico, and there was more running around than on *Primary*. We used helicopters, motorcycles, trucks, jeeps . . . all over that island in a tropical climate. Every night we felt wonderful, and after five days I didn't feel tired at all. I am pretty strong, but fatigue does something terrible to you. You start not to think. You start not doing things because you are too tired. And it can be very damaging. So that is one big difference; and there's another difference that I love. When you carry a big camera, people are constantly coming up to ask where you're from, and they expect you to say, you know, BBC, NBC, ABC. With the small camera, nobody pays much attention. But this will change as people learn that this camera can be just as evil as the big camera.

**You still need two people, one for camera and one for sound?**

You can do it with one person. Ed Pincus,

a charming, intelligent young woman, Sarah Hudson, and she not only didn't threaten him but he cried when she left. It's important not to upset people. And I think if you go in with your headphones on, and a long beard and long hair, covered with wires and things sticking out of you, then you have a disaster.

**You finally find yourself involved in the same two basic problems. First making the film as cheaply as possible, and then finding the most economical way of distributing it. But you stick to the same basic idea of free film-making with sync sound?**

Now I just feel that all sorts of experiments are open, and I would love to do what is normally called a theatrical film. There is a film I want to make, from the only play I have read in many years that has really intrigued me, by the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka. I think it's called *Dances of the Forest*—a difficult, fascinating, brilliant play. To me it's pure theatre: it starts out with two dead people unburying themselves, and it has nothing to do with



naturalism. I'd love to go to Nigeria to film it. And by all means we could do it in super 8, so that it could be run on television. I wouldn't do it in a theatre: we would go outdoors, out into the forest.

**You talk a great deal about masks, and about Greek theatre. What exactly have you in mind?**

For me there are three categories, very crudely. That is, theatre—what I call theatre—where there is no suggestion that this is how people speak and look, and no attempt to imitate reality. And this is essentially Greek theatre. This is not what King Creon looked like, this is not how he sounded, these are not his psychological, naturalistic motivations. We are talking about society, we are talking about the rules of the game, we are talking on a highly theoretical and stylised level. Then, through history, you slowly get the development of naturalism. Theatre got locked into natural-

versions of the same thing. In the peanut stand sequence of *Duck Soup*, where the Marx Brothers did a stylised performance of people getting their hats mixed up, you laugh uproariously. You're not asked to believe that people really behave like this. In the film that I did with Noel Parmentel Jr. on the Republican National Committee, essentially the same thing happens but it's real: these are in fact leading politicians who can't sort out which steak is rare and which is medium and which is well done. They keep handing them around, and it goes on forever, and you really think it's an uproarious comedy scene. Then there was the serious realistic film-maker who borrowed that scene and had actors perform the same routine, which wasn't funny at all—because you knew you were being asked to believe something that wasn't true. This is the weakness of fake realism, which for me is the grey area between the two poles.



'Chiefs' (1969): policeman on parade

istic description of the world and at the end of it—with Chekhov, Ibsen, Arthur Miller's early work—there was an attempt to say this is the way life really is, this is how people look and sound and behave. I'm oversimplifying, of course . . . Then along came film, which was far more naturalistic, even with all its hang-ups. You got the whole development of film picking up where the 19th-century theatre tradition left off. That's where all that energy went. Now in theatre there was a counter-reaction: playwrights like Toller and Brecht had started headlong in the opposite direction, back to a purer form of theatre. But film still went on following naturalism. Till you came to what we did, whatever you want to call it. And it was also at about this point, I think, that theatrical film started heading in the other direction. Someone like Fellini, for instance, forgot about neo-realism, and moved more and more into poetry and fantasy . . . I happen to be extremely interested in pure theatre; and in opera, which to me is the glorious mixed media.

But I'll give you an example: three

And I think this is an area which essentially interests no one, although people will pursue it for years to come . . . Take an example of the early Living Theatre, which to me is the last gasp of theatrical naturalism, a play like *The Connection*, where there was a style suggesting that this wasn't a play at all. Which I found hard to believe, since I knew it was happening punctually at 8.30 every evening. I found it condescending, and irritating. Maybe that's my problem.

**It seems to me that your work with your new equipment is important, but perhaps more significant for South American and African countries than for countries where film-making is more highly developed.**

That's why I went recently to India, to an international conference about making programmes for television. There were people there from all the South American, African and Asian countries; countries which have television and nothing to put on it. No way to make their own films.

India, for instance, needs two thousand film units. I think they will be able to manufacture this equipment themselves,

even though they are so short of hard currency. They can buy the most complicated parts, the cameras and the tape-recorders and so on, and they could do the modifications themselves, which would reduce the cost. But of course you come back to the problem of the establishment. There are people who don't want to go this way; they want to go the professional way and they want to keep control of things. The American networks are not the least bit interested.

**McLuhan said that we are heading towards the global village. But don't you think that with these developments the village is breaking up, and we are moving towards much smaller units of communication?**

Last year, I made a film on VD for the whole of America, and it had many stupid things in it. It was bound to be stupid, because things are not the same everywhere. You look for typical cases; and there is no such thing. I think each community should make its own films: I don't care what they do in Denver, only about what happens in Cambridge. And my whole emphasis, for the moment, is on making films for small groups. It has never been possible before because of the expense. We made a film here—a student, Carol Sands, and I. It's really her film, but I worked with her and helped her. Some doctors here run a volunteer medical clinic, using a truck that goes round at night and parks right on the street. All the workers are volunteers, and they give free medical care to street people who have no money to speak of and have somehow dropped out of the regular way of doing things. They wanted a film of this, so we went out and filmed for one night. We filmed fifteen little rolls of film, and Carol took perhaps a week to edit it. We then transfer direct to video tape. And the total out of pocket cost to the doctors, including the film and lab expenses but not of course any costs for the equipment, is one hundred and nineteen dollars and fifty cents. Since they wanted to show it in big places they made a 16mm. blow-up, which I think loses some quality. That cost them another \$350. But still this was possible.

**Ten years ago you were saying that people are so involved in the whole scene, in the action, that even if they don't understand the language they still get the meaning. Now you're saying that we should make films for small groups, where speech is going to be important . . .**

I was aware ten years ago of this problem; there has always been this contradiction. But look, maybe we are starting another problem. With the development of the LP record, I think that probably more music was destroyed, on a world scale, than you like to think about. The Beatles took over, and the industrial music and the billionaires that created Bob Dylan, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, did a lot to destroy people's own music. I know that in the Canary Islands there is none of their own music left: everyone is playing rock. Maybe it's a good thing that language and words are so important in films. Maybe we can make film-making local rather than international. But I am not so sure that the advent of the LP was a good thing, and we ourselves may be a monster in disguise. I just don't know.



# LET A HUNDRED FLOWERS BLOOM

## Film Form, Style and Aesthetics

Barry Salt

An extensive theoretical framework for the audio-visual medium still seems to be needed, particularly to help with the description of what particular films actually look like (as opposed to what they are about), but also for considering the relation of finished films to their production process, and yet further to give an all-inclusive basis for film teaching. V. F. Perkins' recent *Film as Film*\* makes a good job of clearing the ground of unsatisfactory earlier theories, but his original proposals, after a corner-of-the-eye glimpse of a new possibility, are finally and admittedly both restricted and restrictive. A theory of film which excludes a Godard film (or any other film) must be defective.

Most attempts at a theory of film have always been vitiated by an excessive eagerness to say just what sort of films are good and what sort are bad; by an unconscious desire to justify personal preferences. To make a new start, suitable stages of analysis should be distinguished. These are firstly of the nature of the medium, secondly the possible set of forms, next the style possibilities, and only finally the possible systems of aesthetics that might deal with these forms and styles.

### Form

The first crude holographic films have already been made, and we can anticipate a complete, all-surrounding audio-visual representation of reality being possible at

*Barry Salt is the director of Permutations (or Six Reels of Film to be Shown in Any Order), an experimental film in which each reel is colour-coded and the order in which the reels are shown is determined at random by a member of the audience immediately before the performance. There are 720 possible permutations. The film, which includes a lecture on personality by Professor H. J. Eysenck, is constructed so that the narrative is intelligible whatever order the reels are shown in, but is perceived in a different way at each viewing.*

some time in the future. So the most useful basic way of regarding the medium (and this includes television) is as a more or less faithful reproduction of audio-visual reality. One extreme that is technically possible at this moment would be a pair of 70 mm. colour stereoscopic films with multichannel sound taken of an unstaged event and projected hemispherically so as to fill the complete area of possible vision; while the other extreme would be some kind of small screen abstract film with synthetic sound, or no sound at all.

All films can be considered from a formal point of view to lie on a spectrum between these two extremes, with a greater or lesser degree of distortion or transformation of

\**Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, by V. F. Perkins (Penguin Books, 1972).

reality being introduced in various ways: by making cuts between shots rather than running the camera continuously, using zooms and camera movement within shots, shooting in black and white rather than in colour, using various degrees of non-natural sound, filming acted events rather than actual events, and so obviously on. The amount of distortion of reality introduced in the separate dimensions of the medium (cutting, photography, sound, acting, the events represented, etc.) is not necessarily parallel between these dimensions and the general effect of the film itself, though there is usually not a great divergence.

These dimensions can even be considered semi-quantitatively in many cases; for instance 'strength' of a cut or other shot transition can be defined in terms of the amount of discontinuity in space and time introduced into the action by the cut. Another possibility is a precise analysis of numbers of shots in a film with various shot lengths, and with the various types of shot and camera movements. This approach has produced some interesting preliminary results. It might be claimed that this is a rather arid approach; but considerations of how long a shot is to be, where the camera is to go, and so on, are what the director of a film is principally concerned with. (Remember that acting style has been included as a dimension of the medium as well.)

### Style

Questions of style arise when we consider films in relation to film-makers. If an analysis along the lines just mentioned has been carried out, then the distributions of these quantities (shot length, etc.) for a particular film-maker, when compared with the average for all directors at a certain place and time, gives a sure indication of the existence of a personal style; in fact this is what formal style is. (Analogous analyses have long ago been successfully and usefully carried out for the style of literary and musical works.†)

It could be argued that often the individuality of a director lies in the verbally expressible content of his films, and indeed it often does partly, but this individuality of content will mostly be found allied to formal individuality if the analysis is carried far enough. (That is, by going as far as considering the relation of the type of shot to the type of the succeeding shot—Markov chain analysis.)

The importance of this type of approach is beginning to be recognised, but it still does not go much further than remarking things like the fact that Howard Hawks keeps the camera at eye level and doesn't move it if possible. But in fact there are other directors of his vintage who do this too; for instance, Henry Hathaway. (The first of these peculiarities makes for efficient shooting because the actors can be kept well-framed at all distances without tilting the camera up. If the camera were tilted, the lighting set-up would sometimes have to be changed to keep the back-lights out of the shot.) The real style distinction is that, further than this, Hawks uses more panning shots than

†See *The Computer and Music*, ed. H. B. Lincoln, Cornell, 1970 and *Statistics and Style*, ed. Dolezel and Bailey, Elsevier, 1969.



average, and keeps his average shot length rather longer than normal.

Some recent attempts at style analysis have unfortunately been conducted in spurious terms which ignore conditions imposed on the director, and also the relation between the approach of a particular director and that generally prevailing at the period in question. For instance, the style of Douglas Sirk cannot be simply pinned down by talk about mirrors and flat shiny surfaces. Mirror shots are quite common in dramas made by ordinary Hollywood directors from the 1930s onward (it makes shooting a studio scene more interesting for the director); and in so far as Sirk's films have flat, glossy surfaces, this is due to the art directors at Universal Studios and to the deficiencies of CinemaScope lenses. (Their squeeze ratio varied with object distance, so emphasising the existence of the picture plane.) Actually, Sirk's formal style is distinguished by a so far unremarked excess of low angle shots over the norm. To judge by an unprompted statement, this results from his seeking after expressiveness.

The formal spectrum which was described in the first section, when translated into terms of style, becomes a spectrum stretching from extreme naturalism to extreme expressionism.

If one looks back to statements made by Hollywood directors in past times, it is apparent that they saw their task as one of expressing the material in the script—'putting the story across'—in the most effective way; and a point at issue between them was just how much expression to use—or conversely how much realism. The general desire was to affect the audience in the appropriate way, and this called for the application of unmentioned supplementary principles, unmentioned because obvious, such as internal consistency in all aspects of the film to maintain suspension of disbelief. This is closely related to Victor Perkins' principle of internal coherence. Incidentally, many of the examples discussed in *Film as Film* are cases of the expression of the script content through formal devices. Indeed, discussion of detail in a film in these terms is not new, but it has always taken place within a framework that unfortunately assigned aesthetic values to particular styles and content.

Of course, nearly all commercial films occupy a fairly small central region of the style and form spectra, but the extremes are increasingly taken up by films of the *avant garde* and 'underground'. These last are still denied extensive discussion, partly because the terms for this are lacking, partly for less creditable reasons.

At this stage questions of value, of aesthetics, are still excluded, but there are still lots of things that can be said about films, even in a more general way. For instance, we can say that Bergman's stated preference for filming in black and white rather than colour was because he wished to make films that were more expressionist than the norm; that Preminger used to prefer 'Scope and colour because his intentions were to be more objective (naturalistic) than the average film-maker. We can talk about how the degree of naturalism of the average entertainment film has changed over the years, and about many other interesting matters. And we can

talk about films like Godard's, which contain different styles within a single film.

Nothing has been said about the interaction between style and content, but these second order effects can obviously be dealt with after the first approximation in the analysis has been satisfactorily carried out.

## Aesthetics

Once form and style have been considered, value judgments can be introduced without creating confusion. We may have a preference for a certain degree of realism, and say that films are good in so far as they approach that degree; or we may say that completely abstract films are intrinsically best; or we may use some content-based criterion such as moral worth or political content, or some combinations of these criteria. But the exclusiveness of such positions should be acknowledged.

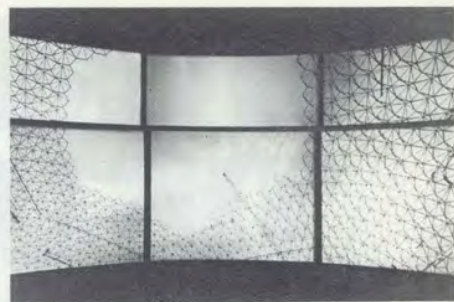
It seems to be more reasonable to accept the style of a film as given, to say that one film is a good direct cinema-type documentary or that another film is a bad expressionist drama, and so on. One part of the criteria for value can be determined by the degree to which the maker's intentions are realised in the film. This criterion is generally rejected out of hand in discussions of general aesthetics, with a certain amount of justification when the example in mind is fine art of the past. But because of the film's short and recent history, interview material from film-makers is fairly easily available, and so their intentions can be found out with sufficient exactness when they are not otherwise obvious.

Another criterion for the worth of a film resides in the difficulty of the task the film-maker sets himself. Making a successful formula picture is less demanding than creating variations within a genre, and much less demanding than successfully tackling a unique type of picture. This approach seems to be followed in a partial and unconscious way in some week by week reviewing of individual films, and more general explicit recognition of it would be all to the good. What we are talking about here is the degree of originality of the work, a fundamental matter, since the continuing occurrence of the exceptional is essential to the existence of art; a fact which makes any more absolute criteria impossible. (Originality is also closely related to the amount of personal expression achieved in a film by its maker; the basic standard of *auteur* theory in the Sarris form.)

A final criterion is the influence a film has on other films; and this of course depends on the estimation other film-makers have for the work in question. This is more important in pure film terms than what audiences or critics think of a film.

These three criteria, the most objective possible, need to be taken into consideration together, not separately, when evaluating a film.

The whole approach to the film outlined here is oriented towards the way film-makers in general see films, and to the realities of film-making, rather than to the point of view of single or collective spectators, as has usually been the case. It is not suggested that this is the only possible way to look at films, but just that it is a widely embracing and powerful approach, and useful too. ■





# WITNESSES OF WAR

Penelope Houston

It has been impossible this winter to get away from the 1940s. Apart from the darkened streets, looming shortages, and the inevitable politicians' reflex of calling out the Dunkirk spirit, television has been offering up double rations of its favourite decade. Vera Lynn is back (or was never away); Greer Garson in *Mrs. Miniver* puts her good housekeeping seal of approval on the hostilities; and *49th Parallel* even revived a distant conflict, with Michael Powell writing to *The Times* to say that he was British and proud of his picture, even if Korda and some others at the time thought it emerged as pro-German propaganda. The Germans have complained that the British can't get through a crisis without *Colditz*. Even children's television has chipped in with a serial about evacuees. In the circumstances, Thames Television's 26 weeks of *The World at War*—more than 21 hours of film, produced at a cost of not much under £1m—has run some risk of being regarded simply as more of the same.



US troops land on Luzon, January 1945. US official footage included in the 1945 Ministry of Information compilation 'The Unrelenting Struggle'

The timing of the Thames series is of course fortuitous; Jeremy Isaacs and his team began work back in 1971, expected to finish somewhat sooner than they did, and in any case could hardly have been prescient enough to foresee the extraordinary mood of 1974. It was a series that someone was bound sooner or later to essay—the someone being originally odds-on the BBC, who had not only done their earlier series on the Great War, but are inclined to leave others with the impression that they have the major twentieth century occasions under copyright. Thames had the added spur of demonstrating that anything the BBC could do, they could do at least as well.

Undoubtedly, and at most of the levels where it matters, *The World at War* is a success. Popular television has a duty to be

honestly popular; and this is good television, driving forward every week, building up personality as a series (not least through Carl Davis' title music). It has found a sufficiently adroit balance between grand design and personal reminiscence; it conveys the extent to which the world really was at war, and the relationships between theatres of action; it resists chauvinistic impulses to put Britain's war effort at the centre of its stage. In fact the series has already shown in America, running several weeks in advance of the British screenings; and the knowledge that an undertaking on this scale needs foreign purchasers could itself be an incentive towards thinking internationally. (Whether German television will be a customer, incidentally, remains to be seen.) Perhaps more import-

antly, the series allows its contributors to take attitudes. It has not neutralised personality, or felt that controversial statement must be backed by overwhelming evidence or balanced by a counter-view. The charge of superficiality can always be levelled against this sort of enterprise, because however much it gets in, it will always leave an amazing amount out. And the danger of doubtful interpretation has to be balanced against the danger of no interpretation at all. Jerome Kuehl, whose somewhat vague but undoubtedly significant credit is that of 'script associate', says in an article in the SFTA Journal that 'unanimity does not in fact exist; but none of the commentaries are written by persons of conspicuously eccentric views.' Fair enough.

But is it history, or is it journalism? And is there really a distinction to be made? Individual episodes vary a good deal in what they've tried to extract from the basic raw material of old film and new interview. David Elstein, for instance, says that in the early episode which he directed called *Distant War*, his main aim was to focus on Churchill's emergence as Prime Minister, and the deep-rooted mistrust of the old political adventurer. To get to this point—which of course must be developed through the words of Lord Butler and Lord Boothby and John Colville, with hardly a hint of help from the news cameras of the day—he had to take the more atmospheric account of the 'phony war' at a very fast clip indeed. Similarly, with his later episode *The Bomb*, Elstein's purpose was to piece together as lucidly argued an account as time and his material allows of the war's most controversial decision, subordinating film and build-up to hindsight, memory and interview. (Though one still has the impression that bouncy Harry Truman invited the cameras into his office much more regularly than Roosevelt, or than British statesmen of the day.) By contrast, there's John Pett's Burma episode, *It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow*, an impressionistic study of a forgotten battlefield, relying considerably on the visual impact of the jungle.

And there are the three major Russian episodes, *Barbarossa* (the German advance), *Stalingrad* and *Red Star* (largely the siege of Leningrad), in which attitudes emerge partly through the way film itself is deployed. *Barbarossa* becomes, inescapably, the tragedy of the German army, trapped in the shock of the Russian winter, barely protected against the cold, struggling with its huge bogged down war machine. *Stalingrad* is an epic drama of closely balanced forces, the material cut so forcefully that at times it looks like a war feature from which the speaking parts have been excised. The suffering within the city is matched by the despair of its attackers; dramatically, the impersonal battle itself takes command. *Red Star*, by contrast, is told from a Soviet viewpoint, with moving use of Russian poems, shots of corpses lying like frozen black mounds in the snow of city streets, and of keening women reclaiming their dead. There is no film of the enemy at the gates of Leningrad, though presumably they were no less vulnerable, miserable and brave than the German troops at Stalingrad. Film retains its immediacy more than any other historical tool—and the series shows its awareness of this in its fondness for



freezing on the emotive image. If Martin Smith (who directed *Red Star*) had chosen to show more Germans, and Hugh Raggett (*Stalingrad*) to concentrate exclusively on Stalingrad's defenders, the impact—although not necessarily the historical sense—of these episodes might be rather different.

Film, in other words, can remain dynamite, to be handled with care and with a clear sense of what purpose it is intended to serve. The makers of the *Genocide* episode, about the concentration camps, apparently tried to flatten the tone, to avoid blatant emotional statement; but according to Jeremy Isaacs the material itself must resist the treatment. At far less obvious levels—like a shot of the leafy English lanes before D-Day, choked with military traffic—the incongruity, unexpectedness or association of the image oversteps its context. In general, the makers of compilation films have made up their own ground rules about how to handle the combustible stuff, and until fairly recently the professional historians seemed inclined to treat the visual evidence as so much wallpaper. It is only during the last few years that historians, at least in this country, have shown much concern with film as evidence and with the integrity of the screen documents; although they are now making up for previous neglect.

Seven years or so ago, at the time of the BBC's Great War series, I remember the Imperial War Museum (now Thames' collaborators on their enterprise) telling me that the BBC had been to some pains to reverse footage, so that the Germans would always be seen advancing from screen right to left. The IWM thought this a fairly unnecessary and even reprehensible way of simplifying matters for audiences; and although reversing film is hardly a major crime, it seems unlikely that it would be done to this extent today. Howlers are always possible, and historians more familiar with the written word than with the way things look are inclined to put touching faith in their researchers, and to find themselves describing the superiority of one tank over a picture of another. But on the whole, historians are becoming more aware of the film, and film-makers are including a higher percentage of trained historians.

Talking to members of the *World at War* team, one gets the impression that they certainly don't need outside historians to point out the hazards and the need for scruple. Perhaps this isn't yet general; but the more accurate the research, the sooner the compilation film will be rescued from half a century of bad habits. As Jerome Kuehl puts it, there are extremes of attitude. On the one hand, 'everything is what it is and not another thing, and every piece of film was shot at a particular time and a particular place . . . no scenes which have not been positively identified can ever legitimately be used.' On the other, all's fair in the stock shot war. There is obviously no point in inhibiting film-makers by demands for an impossible accuracy: stock shot answers to 'the notion that if you've seen one Stuka, you've seen them all.' But the *World at War* ground rules seem to be that you don't allow film which you positively know to have been shot at another time or place (though you may be going on



Goebbels tours bombed Berlin. *Deutsche Wochenschau*, November 1943

hope rather than certainty), and that you try to identify propaganda material and fiction of the time, to distinguish it cleanly from the objective record. In the *Stalingrad* film, the meeting of the two Soviet armies is identified as reconstruction—just as well, since the quality of the film risks proclaiming it. But quality—or apparent falsity—is not necessarily a clue; as Raye Farr, one of the two principal researchers, points out, the footage shot by directors like Wyler and Huston could even carry over a Hollywood lighting style to the front line. One episode—and in the event one of the best—in *The World at War* was pulled apart and put together again because an enthusiastic director had fallen into the trap of using effective but historically incorrect footage. And as an aid to anyone who wants to sort out the film historically, there are 'story cards', filed at the Imperial War Museum, through which it's possible to check the provenance of all the material.

The limitations on research are obvious. As Jeremy Isaacs says, you could send a team of objective researchers for years into the archives, assembling all the conceivable evidence before you began framing your programmes. Or you can work to a timetable and a budget, with directors and writers laying down fairly clear guidelines for the researchers and perhaps thereby cutting down on their ability to surprise themselves. Film proves what you want it to prove. No one has the resources to try it the first way—certainly not on this scale. Within the second way, success will depend on the accuracy of guidelines, the tenacity

and initiative of researchers and, significantly, the helpfulness and knowledgeability of archives.

Most people probably have the impression that *The World at War* has shown them a great deal of unfamiliar footage. David Elstein, speaking from a position of experience in this kind of film-making, thinks otherwise. 'There is not much new to me . . . most of the film has been seen before, and other footage is simply unavailable.' If he's right, the impression of new material is achieved by the knife-sharp editing that has marked the series and by avoidance of the inescapably hackneyed image. When one talks of 'unavailable' footage, what exactly is meant? Not shot, not kept, not found, or for some reason held outside the film-makers' reach? In this instance, the researchers had only late and limited access to Soviet sources, which in any case are often said to be none too trustworthy in the way of identifying material. At this late stage, it would be surprising if there remains any great cache anywhere of unresearched Second War material. There is always the suggestion, however, of an unrelaxed censorship hold over certain British and American footage. How true is this? It would be interesting to find out.

In war, the newsreel is propaganda—sometimes to an unexpected extent. Apparently it was British policy that any track along bombed out buildings should begin or end with an intact structure: we wanted to win sympathy by showing devastation, but not to encourage the enemy by advertising its full extent. During the Plymouth raids, local people fled to temporary encampments in the neighbouring hills: this footage, understandably, never got on to wartime screens. Jeremy Isaacs says that he finds it hard to believe audiences took so uncomplainingly the tone of the British wartime newsreel, with its posed encounters with the populace, almost desperate jokiness and heartiness (in retrospect, we were forever 'giving Jerry a taste of his own medicine'), and air of being somehow above reality. Stuart Hood suggested in our last issue that the Grierson doctrine of 'working up the raw material of life', and the aesthetic emphasis of pre-war documentary,

Roosevelt and Stalin at Yalta. *British newsreel*, 1945





carried over to emerge in the war years as an inhibiting acceptance of stereotype. Griersonian documentary in the 1930s remained remote from the news, and the newsreel was left to go its own limited and ultimately self-destructive way. Certainly, compared with the material from Germany and Russia, British news film up to D-Day looks bloodless, as though trapped somewhere between the *Daily Express* and the D-Notice. There is always Jennings, of course; but even Jennings made *Fires Were Started* as a reconstruction.

Newsreel material will have been structured for a purpose, and can only with difficulty be pulled apart again; the original rushes are likely to be more useful. There are significant gaps in the record. David Elstein says, for instance, that the Japanese never recorded air-raid damage in Tokyo; and closer home it's evident that any record of the war at sea must be largely a matter of going by approximation and training film. More startling, in some ways, is what has survived. One is continually surprised that the Germans should apparently have taken trouble to record their own atrocities—like the shots in *Genocide* of men firing at victims already lined up in an open grave. In quite another sense, it's almost equally surprising that Soviet film shot after the churches had been reopened, in an attempt to raise morale for the desperate battle, should look not merely dutiful but actually devout.

But can the film evidence ever go beyond what is already known? Can it actually change a historical interpretation, or throw significant new light on an event? I would doubt this very much, and no one to whom I put the question could suggest any positive instance. The limitation on the value of film is that it's a highly selective record (we think we know Hitler from his speeches: apparently the cameramen never recorded more than the last two minutes), depending on commentary for interpretation and even identification. Diplomacy and politics and economics, the determining factors of history, are not for the camera, and the film from Yalta and Potsdam and other great, tension-ridden wartime encounters is as bland as the best butter. Battles can't be filmed so that they can be understood, only to record the endless anonymity of the guns. Nor, it seems to me, can film convey with any precision the complexities of the tone of a time: for the collapse of Crete, read Evelyn Waugh, and for the demob mood, Anthony Powell. Film's unique and spectacular power is to freeze the single moment: the camera track along a line of men in defeat, staring into the eyes of exhaustion, the faces in the assault craft on D-Day, a Guernica shot of limbs piled in a mass grave, old women picking their way along ruined streets pushing prams, the resignation and disbelief of crowds in Japan listening to their Emperor announcing the surrender. Film satisfies the desire to see what it looked like. This series, quite rightly, relies on interview to explain what it meant.

In this sense, the closer the record sticks to film, following where the available material leads, the more likely it is to pull history back towards journalism. I think *The World at War* probably does this—and

also that this is no criticism. As Jerome Kuehl points out, this is *television* history: nothing is gained by pretending that it's the written record, or would be the written record if it could, or reproaching it for failing to get into areas of conflict and complex argument which belong elsewhere. David Elstein suggests that the logical step, during the next round of World War Two series, would be to take half a dozen aspects of the war and build four-hour films around them, after the manner of *The Sorrow and the Pity*. But Marcel Ophuls himself has said that 'for the type of work I'm involved in, the research and the homework and the classic journalistic approach are not enough'; that what is needed is personal involvement, the mixture of 'politics and autobiography'. Which again could lead one away from the necessary detachment and the long perspectives of history.

At the time of writing, it has not been possible to see *The World at War* right through to a conclusion. Two, possibly key final programmes, *Reckoning* (written and produced by Jerome Kuehl) and *Remember* (Jeremy Isaacs himself) are still in the works. But among the most valuable, revealing and in some ways provocative material seen so far have been the two programmes produced by Phillip Whitehead, *Home Fires* (Britain 1940-1944) and *Inside the Reich* (Germany during the same period). In a sense, the programmes are like mirror images, reflecting the awful sameness of civilian war and the significant differences. I asked Jerry Kuehl if the close details of contrast and comparison (the tiredly humming English factory girls from *Listen to Britain*; cream-fed German women typing to music, etc.) had emerged from the mass of material, or whether the research had been angled towards finding them. As usual, it appeared to be a bit of both. The British material was collected first; the researcher (Raye Farr on both programmes) set out for Germany with certain guidelines.

Neither programme probably contains any revelation to war historians; but even history as recent as this blurs in the average memory. Would everyone, for instance, have realised that it was Britain which mobilised women while Germany was still urging the duty of motherhood (a parade of prams, lined up in a street shot like a destroyer flotilla)? Or that Britain, more than Germany, first accepted the idea of total war? Or that the totalitarian Germans, as well as the muddled British, found efforts to mobilise industry handicapped by local attitudes and authorities?

The graph of *Inside the Reich* (written by Neal Ascherson) runs from euphoria to despair. In 1940 the quick war had been fought and won, shops were well stocked, and the impression is of a relaxed and victorious people lolling in an autumn sun. By 1944, German towns were rubble, Hitler had retreated from contact with his people, and the mass swearing in of the defence militia force shows faces closed, haggard and beyond hope. Goebbels was left to face it out for the Führer; and a remarkable shot, again undercutting expectation, shows him crouched back in his car during a visit to a bombed city, while a large lady on the pavement seems to be giving him more than a piece of her mind.

*Home Fires*, written by Angus Calder, is a programme built on political consciousness, emphasising the areas of dissent which were to lead to the 1945 election result. The programme stresses such episodes as the attempt to gag the *Daily Mirror*, the controversial by-election which returned Tom Driberg, the miners' strike (it was the Kent miners at Betteshanger who first struck illegally; and on February 9th 1974 the BBC news cameras went to Betteshanger to film the miners coming off their last pre-strike shift). Parallel to this, however, comes the view of a society mobilised to a purpose and achieving (as Michael Foot points out) a kind of socialism through a conception of fairness. The propagandist emphasis, and the authentic moral drive behind often simplistic exhortation, were more powerful than one remembered. So was the ability of government to talk to workers—contrast Bevin's appeal for cheerfulness with the tone of anyone in authority whom we've been listening to over the last few months.

One would need to know a great deal more about the available material to appreciate how close to 'accuracy' these two programmes come. The sameness of suffering is inevitable: on the bomb sites, Coventry blends with Berlin. But the differences that emerge are extremely clear. In Britain, a growing appetite for social justice, perhaps because a kind of justice seemed to have been achieved. In Germany, a growing sense of division between government and people. In Britain, the individual faces and arguing voices; in Germany, only the faces of a failing leadership. Fair shares British propaganda (passengers and conductress scowling at the sheepish man who's grabbed a bus seat for a one-stop ride) contrasts with the no shares Nazi propaganda for euthanasia, the animal shots of mental defectives. (Though who actually saw these German films, and how general was their distribution?) As the war progressed, Britain seems to have become increasingly sane and Germany increasingly mad; and the question in the context is not so much whether this is objectively 'true' (as the broadest of generalisations, no doubt it is), as how far the evidence of the contemporary material would lead to no other conclusion.

It's interesting and significant that Thames are prepared to show historians the bulk of the material from which some of the programmes were prepared, and to ask them how differently they might have seen fit to shape it. Part of television's problem is the general public's acceptance of it as an authoritative, know-all voice, the pundit by the hearth. We all know, or ought to, that the camera can lie itself blue in the lens, but because of its irreversible evidence of a single moment in time, there is a sense in which the camera is expected to tell the truth. The average viewer is not trained to sift visual evidence; and in any case the continuous television spectacle gives him no time to do so. Critics have often proved remarkably uncritical of what is put before them as fact. The further back that critical attitudes start, therefore, the better; and *The World at War* team, having obviously asked a great many questions of their own material, are now ready to let in the historical inspection teams to look further. The exercise should be instructive. ■





# cops



## Philip French

If one were to suggest the ideal hero for the biggest American box-office hit of 1974, he would be a tough, middle-aged plain clothes policeman possessed by the devil in a middle-western city at the height of the 1930s Depression. To have predicted this even four years ago, when anarchic, youth-oriented, anti-establishment movies were all the rage, would have been to invite hoots of derision. Yet three highly successful movies of 1967-68—*Bonnie and Clyde*, *Rosemary's Baby* and *Bullitt*—foreshadowed this Seventies fascination with nostalgia, the occult and the cops. And this triple fascination is closely related to the crises and anxieties of the Sixties. Much has already been written about the nostalgia boom and the cult of the occult; less has been said about the police business, which is as interesting, though less socially pervasive, a phenomenon.

There have of course always been police in movies—lovable Irish flatfoots on the neighbourhood beat, the Keystone Cops, federal agents, and so on. In the mid-Thirties there was a wave of police films, William Keighley's *G-Men* (1935) prominent among them, after Hollywood producers were requested to transfer their attention from mobsters to lawmen; and there was another cycle in the late Forties. In both cases they came—as the present one has come—after widespread public criticism had been directed at the industry's alleged social irresponsibility and excessive violence.

Unlike most other countries, America has never been reluctant to have the shortcomings of its police revealed in the cinema. There have been plenty of crooked cops (*The Street With No Name*, 1948), brutal cops (*Where the Sidewalk Ends*, 1950), overzealous cops (*Boomerang*, 1947), paranoid cops (*Touch of Evil*, 1958), and neurotically unbalanced cops (*Detective Story*, 1951), and in virtually all private-eye movies the hero gets pushed around by the suspicious official fuzz. Until recently, however, the general tendency has been to depict such men as exceptional and undesirable, the 'normal' cop being a hardworking, honest, well-adjusted family man. In *The Naked City* (1948), for example, the detectives (Don Taylor and Barry Fitzgerald) are shown as kindly, scrupulous men, the salt of the earth when compared with the idle rich they investigate; this excessively bland portrait of the cops was the work of screenwriter Albert Maltz and director Jules Dassin, both men of the left who were subsequently black-listed. This benevolent, traditional view has been upheld through the twenty-odd years of TV police series, from Jack Webb's pioneering *Dragnet* up to *Ironside* and the exotic *Mod Squad*. But it has changed in the cinema in a rather interesting way.

The two outstanding police pictures of 1966—Norman Jewison's *In the Heat of the Night* and Arthur Penn's *The Chase*—were both impeccably liberal movies in which upright lawmen stood up against, and morally above, ignorant, prejudiced, violent communities in respectively the Deep South and Texas. The liberal tradition continued, though with a greater degree of physical violence, through three significant pictures of 1968—Don Siegel's *Madigan*, Gordon Douglas' *The Detective* and Peter Yates' *Bullitt*, all of which were able to take advantage of the new permissiveness in language and the depiction of the urban milieu. Henry Fonda's commissioner in *Madigan*, Frank Sinatra's New York homicide investigator in *The Detective* and Steve McQueen's San Francisco plain clothes man in *Bullitt*, were sensible, sensitive men doing a difficult job with the minimum of force in a context of political interference and public indifference. What the pictures further shared was a concern for the mystique of police work and law enforcement that was soon to become familiar.

Outside of these police pictures, in the youth and counter-culture movies, the cops were most frequently presented as vicious, racist and corrupt, the iron fist of a repressive society. To take three rep-

Above: Robert Blake in 'Electra Glide in Blue'.  
Clint Eastwood in 'Magnum Force'



representative films of 1969—*Medium Cool* shows us the cops as proto-fascists, beating up the young demonstrators at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago the year before; *Alice's Restaurant* presents the policeman as a moderately amiable but uncomprehending buffoon and archetypal square; *Easy Rider* gives us the cop as a paranoid redneck and hippie-hater.

Naturally, it was only part of the great American audience that didn't like cops in the late Sixties—the dissident young, the blacks, the under-privileged among them. The middle Americans, 'the silent majority' that Nixon and Agnew named and courted in the 1968 presidential election, loved cops. The more demonstrative among them carried on their cars the bumper slogan 'Support Your Local Police', an apparently reasonable and inoffensive suggestion, but in reality a badge proclaiming the car's owner a right-wing supporter of 'Law and Order', another coded phrase for restoring peace to the cities at any price. At the end of *Bullitt* we are shown a dishonest, right-wing politician sporting this sticker on his car.

The two great issues of the 1968 election had been peace in Vietnam and Law and Order in the cities. Nixon promised both but by 1970 had delivered neither. Hollywood wouldn't finance pictures about the war, because the issues were too complicated, the subject too divisive and the box-office value highly dubious. John Wayne alone had the nerve to press on in the face of much discouragement to make *The Green Berets*. Instead Hollywood turned to World War II and the Korean War with three big 1970 releases that handled the war theme in such a fashion that doves and hawks could read diametrically opposed messages into them—*Patton*, *Tora! Tora! Tora!* and *M\*A\*S\*H*. The most significant of these, for its calculated ambivalence, is Franklin Schaffner's *Patton*, a model of how to present a character in such a way that he can be either admired or hated, or simultaneously admired and hated, and seen as a necessary evil in his particular situation. The opening scene is especially skilful in exploiting different attitudes to the American flag, to uniforms, to patriotic rhetoric, to obscenity, to the charismatic martial leader, the misunderstood hero, the warrior in a civilised society, the inscrutable loner, the martyr in the democratic cause. The picture proved an enormous success with people of all ages and political opinions. Schaffner's film not only opened the way for a new-style police hero but showed the consciously ambivalent fashion in which he should be presented. Shortly afterwards, the cinema jumped off the youth band-wagon and on to the police paddy-wagon. The pattern for the movie cop was *Patton*, and most of the characteristics and contradictions ascribed above to the portrait of the World War II general are shared by the movies' new men in blue.

In the vanguard in 1971 we had Donald Sutherland, leading male star of the emerging anti-establishment cinema, playing the uniformed cop in *Klute*, and—more influentially—Gene Hackman as the foul-mouthed racist Jimmy 'Popeye' Doyle in *The French Connection* and Clint Eastwood as the omni-competent Inspector Harry Callahan in *Dirty Harry*. The immediate



Styles in cops. John Wayne in 'McQ'; detective Eddie Egan in 'The French Connection'; Clint Eastwood in 'Magnum Force'; Al Pacino in 'Serpico'

success of the latter pair led to the wave of police pictures that swept over us in late 1972 and throughout 1973, and that shows little sign of abating. We've had *The New Centurions* (shown in Britain as *Precinct 45—Los Angeles Police*), *Badge 373*, *Walking Tall*, *The Seven-Ups*, *Magnum Force*, *Electra Glide in Blue*, *Serpico*, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, with (at the time of writing) *Cops and Robbers*, *Busting*, John Wayne as *McQ*\*, and many more to come.

All of them are indebted to *The French*

\*Since writing this article, I note that in his review of *McQ*, Alexander Walker applies to cop movies the same categories that in my recent book *Westerns* I applied to the Western movies (Kennedy Western, Goldwater Western, etc.); modesty prevented me from anticipating him.

*Connection* and *Dirty Harry*, and several show the direct influence of *Patton*. The latter's pre-credit sequence, for instance, is deliberately echoed in the opening of both *Electra Glide in Blue* and *Magnum Force*, where the cops are introduced to us, as *Patton* is, through items of equipment and uniform, on which the camera lingers fetishistically; George C. Scott's playing of the alienated patrolman in *The New Centurions* frequently recalls his impersonation of *Patton*. Another picture many of them recall is *Psycho*—or at least a single shot in Hitchcock's movie: the huge close-up of the Arizona patrolman wearing large sun-glasses that the fugitive Janet Leigh sees peering down at her when she awakes in her car. This peculiarly powerful image suggests something menacing and all-seeing, and it plays on our latent sense of guilt that cops exploit.

One doesn't wish to deny individuality to all of these films. Certainly they vary in sophistication from the crude, rabble-rousing B-feature exposé techniques of Phil Karlson's *Walking Tall* (which is very nearly a reprise of the same director's *Phenix City Story*, made almost twenty years ago) to the delicately balanced ironies and visual elegance of James William Guercio's *Electra Glide in Blue*. The heroes likewise are strung along a spectrum from the hippie cop Frank Serpico, who nearly paid with his life for exposing the corruption of the New York force, to the uncouth 'Popeye' Doyle, though the majority are encountered towards the latter's end. Nevertheless, because of their shared themes, plots, characters and locations (mostly San Francisco and New York), they tend to merge in the memory to form a single extended picture; and a singularly bloody and brutal one it is.

Several factors intensify this effect. The same professional advisers, writers, producers and cameramen turn up again and again. Philip D'Antoni, for instance, produced *Bullitt* and *The French Connection*, and has now directed *The Seven-Ups*, which naturally includes another of his long drawn out, wildly destructive car chases. These crazy police auto derbies—the credibility of which is usually in inverse ratio to the length and virtuosity—are now considered an essential feature of the genre. Casting also lends an air of uniformity—the same actor plays Harry Callahan's black assistant in *Magnum Force* and Sheriff Buford Pusser's Tennessee deputy in *Walking Tall*; Mitchell Ryan appears as a mentally disturbed cop in both *Magnum Force* and *Electra Glide in Blue*, and as an apparently sane Boston detective in *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*; Roy Scheider was the hero's sidekick in *The French Connection* before being elevated to the leadership of the special crime squad called *The Seven-Ups*.

They have moreover evolved very rapidly into a semi-enclosed genre in the sense that the films not only refer to or echo each other, but they look into a mirror as it were and take themselves as their own subject matter. In this they resemble a good deal of recent art and popular culture both good and bad. Thus the problem of crime, its prevention and cure, has moved to the periphery; equally the business of detection



is handled in an increasingly perfunctory fashion, the deliberate obfuscation of the plot often concealing this. What the pictures are about is the situation—ethical, aesthetic and existential—of being a cop.

Now all these police heroes are men with, if not a social mission, certainly a vocation. Why they have always wanted to be cops is left a mystery or only vaguely explained; sexual maladjustment is hinted at in several instances, as it is in Elio Petri's *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (this however might result from having such a job), and so is personal inferiority. Yet oddly, once they are in the force and therefore alienated from the community around them, they experience a second alienation by being constantly at loggerheads with most of their professional colleagues and superiors. This applies as much to crude tough-guys like Doyle, Callahan and Pusser as it does to the naively dedicated John Wintergreen (Robert Blake) of *Electra Glide* and the equally idealistic, equally short Frank Serpico (Al Pacino).

Much time is devoted to talking about what it means to be a police officer, and much energy is expended upon internecine strife, the opponents being according to the circumstances either corrupt, right-wing bigots or lily-livered liberals who insist upon respect for the law, civil rights and such expendable niceties. Indeed these cops despise the fickle public and most of their fellow peace officers almost as much as, in some cases more than, the criminals they pursue in the time they have left over from station-house bickering. The comedy of this situation is occasionally perceived, though the paranoia it reveals is scarcely recognised, except in two splendidly humorous moments in *Electra Glide*. The first is when a sergeant prepares a squad of cops for duty at a pop concert by hurling anti-police obscenities at them. (A parallel sequence in *Medium Cool* showed a group of plain clothes men in a police exercise playing their role as provocative insulting yuppies with a little too much enthusiasm.) The other scene is when a deranged detective, in the course of a characteristically self-pitying speech about crime and the high police mortality rate, claims that 'this country is undergoing a carefully formulated policy of police genocide.'

The clearest example of this generic introspection is *Magnum Force*, a poor film but too easily dismissed as an unworthy, opportunistic sequel to Don Siegel's highly accomplished *Dirty Harry*. For *Magnum*

*Force* is not a further adventure for Eastwood's Inspector Callahan but—in John Milius' cunning screenplay—a picture about *Dirty Harry*. Many critics called Callahan a fascist and considered Siegel's picture a reprehensible 'law-and-order' tract that played upon every middle-American prejudice about the young, the Supreme Court, the state of the cities, permissiveness and so forth. *Magnum Force* sets out to challenge this view by making Callahan's opponents not civilian offenders but a team of fanatical young patrolmen, who band together with the approval of a long-service captain to form a secret squad whose mission it is to eliminate criminals (sadistic pimps, labour racketeers, etc.) that the law cannot touch.

Such bodies have existed and do exist in fact—the film knowingly refers to the Brazilian police's unofficial 'death squad' and to the citizens' vigilante committees formed in 19th-century San Francisco. Such groups flourish even more in fiction, and appeal strongly to the impotent and frustrated on whose fantasies they feed. We saw them in the fiction of Sapper and Edgar Wallace after the Great War, in such post-World War II entertainments as the British film and play *Noose* (a group of ex-Commandos cleaning up Soho), and we're experiencing a revival of them now in the wake of the Vietnam War. *The Seven-Ups* is about an officially approved special squad operating on the very edge of the law. Many black movies—*Slaughter* and *Gordon's War* for example—feature Vietnam veterans using their military training for purposes of rough justice and vengeance back home, there being no thought of calling on the cops to do the job.

Not surprisingly, the blonde, blue-eyed, immaculately turned out leader of the self-appointed executioners in *Magnum Force* has served in Vietnam. He and his friends, the film is saying, are the real fascists, not Harry, who in tracking them down with his customary brutal efficiency establishes himself as the very bulwark of democracy. That the case is crudely and dishonestly put does not take away from the fact that the film's producers found it worthwhile to pursue this political point, rather than to pursue ordinary criminals. One scene in the film stands out from the rest for its clarity and wit—a police shooting contest in which hot-shot Callahan is out-gunned by the secret squad's young leader. Negotiating a surprise target range, Harry loses points by opening fire on a plywood policeman that suddenly appears before him. The spectators gasp with horror and the umpire admonishes

him with the words, 'You shot the good guy, Harry.'

Most of these films acknowledge the assistance of the police; or are written by cops (Joseph Wambaugh, author of *The New Centurions*, recently returned to duty with the Los Angeles police after becoming bored with the literary life); or are based on the experiences of policemen (the exploits and personality of the unorthodox Eddie Egan, for instance, inspired both *The French Connection* and *Badge 373* and he himself has turned to acting, playing both cops and crooks); or purport to follow non-fiction works with some degree of fidelity, as *Serpico* does. Yet for all the claims in the opening and closing titles, for all the apparently unvarnished and unwhitewashed language and deportment, for all the grimy locations and semi-documentary style camerawork, these pictures only intermittently have the feel of reality. They just do not stand up to comparison with such books as John Hersey's *The Algiers Motel Incident* and Morton Hunt's *The Mugging*, which attempt to examine criminal cases and the relationship between the law enforcement agencies and the public in all their many-layered complexity. Indeed the films are ultimately most interesting as exercises in myth-making; at their best—and not merely as entertainment—when most consciously working as fables.

I have little doubt that these current variations on older figures, myths and attitudes are due quite as much to the disappointments, frustrations and conflicts caused by the Vietnam fiasco—an unwinnable war that betrayed its supporters and rejected its heroes—as they are to the problems of present-day urban life. In the light of this contention, it will be interesting to see how the genre develops over the next year or so, and in what direction. The effect of the Watergate Affair is cardinal here and could explain the immense and immediate popular response to Sidney Lumet's *Serpico*, which can easily be viewed as a left-wing reformist fable advocating a wholesale cleansing of the system. *The Seven-Ups*, however, is also drawing big crowds and its heroes' behaviour is not greatly different from that of the White House plumbers. So far one minor masterpiece (*Dirty Harry*) and a couple of highly diverting entertainments have emerged from what *could* prove to be less a valuable genre than a repetitive cycle, in which gimmickry is substituted for innovation, thudding over-emphasis for depth, pastiche for style. ■

## From Murnau to Munich

from page 103

atmosphere there is seems to derive almost entirely from the wonderful decors of Kurt Richter and Ernst Stern. Lubitsch's oft-praised handling of crowds in *Madame DuBarry* and *Anne Boleyn* seems pedestrian, looking far better in stills than in actual movement. As a 'humaniser of history' Lubitsch reduced characters like Louis XV and Henry VIII to caricatures rather than to ordinary men. In each of the genres in which Lubitsch worked, one can point to another director or two of roughly the same

period who was doing superior work—from the more human and dramatic epics of Griffith to Lang's far more witty and atmospheric exotic tales in *Der müde Tod*. Only one of the German Lubitsch films might be pointed to as a clear success and as an indication of the work he was to do later in America: *Die Puppe*. Here Lubitsch is working entirely in a stylised world; indeed the film begins with the director himself placing puppets into a model of his sets. *Die Puppe* demonstrates a fine dramatic pacing which escaped the director in *Carmen*, and the lightest of comic suggestion which is missing from *Kohlhiesels Tochter*.

The films are, of course, more interesting finally because they were the first efforts of a director who went on to better things—which is often the case in an auteurist universe—than because they are in themselves great achievements. Certainly if we were to apply a critical measure based on the German Lubitsch, we could safely point to the films of Kluge, Herzog and Syberberg as of greater sophistication, depth and grace, and already trumpet it a 'new golden age'—when what we really have at this point are some recently discovered nuggets and the promise of still rich veins in the old mine. ■



# Film REVIEWS



'American Graffiti'

## American Graffiti

After the future society of *THX 1138*, George Lucas has, with his second feature film, made a no less imaginative leap back into the past. Though it's set on a single summer's night in 1962, the action of *American Graffiti* (CIC) in fact unfolds against a cleverly generalised background, compounded of representative sounds, attitudes, mannerisms and material props from the preceding decade. Yet the spirit of the 1950s is distilled with such carefully controlled nonchalance into just under two hours of screen time that it's only when the film's closing titles spell out the fates awaiting its four principal characters that one notices the presence of Significant Statement, which has been lurking all along behind the casual, impressionistic surfaces.

The night which has witnessed the nervous consumption of so many burgers and French fries and given rise to so many tearful teenage traumas, awkward back-seat fumbblings and abortive drives up and down the main strip is at once archetypal and unique: a typical evening of adolescence remembered, but also one which marks the ending of an age of innocence—one on which decisions are made which will irrevocably determine the course of the characters' adult lives. After the affectionate nostalgia comes the moment of reckoning, when we as spectators are invited to recognise that yesterday's ephemera shape tomorrow's destinies.

Fortunately, the philosophical sting is confined to the tail, and for most of the film Lucas maintains a delicate balance between generalised emotion and precise detail. His setting is a small town in Northern California (assembled from pieces of San Rafael, San Francisco and Petaluma), and its social focus is

the local drive-in where teenagers intermittently stop off, less to obtain sustenance from the roller-skated waitresses than to consider possible ways of spending the evening and to check out that no one else is having a better time than they are. It's the automobile which determines the hierarchy here, and the uncontested king is John Milner, driver of a '32 custom Ford duce coupe, at 22 still patrolling high-school territory. At the bottom of the heap is Terry Fields, a 17-year-old with pimples, spectacles and an ignominious Vespa, who tacitly accepts that appearance is boss and obligingly answers to the nickname of 'Toad'. Between these two extremes are Curt (with an old Citroen, a university scholarship and a sister called Laurie who's the school cheer-leader); and Laurie's boyfriend Steve, last year's Class President, with a '58 Chevy. Steve and Curt are both scheduled to fly east to college next morning, though Curt has doubts about leaving home and Laurie is frightened of being left behind without a ring. In anticipation of his departure, Steve lends Terry his car, and (with so many classic adolescent problems casually sketched in during the opening sequence) Lucas thereafter follows the four boys and their cars through a long sleepless night.

His technique is almost aggressively fragmented, with the characters meeting up casually at high-school hop, drag-race or drive-in, only to separate in dogged pursuit of an elusive happiness. The poignancy of their separateness—their need for company matched by dissatisfaction with the company they keep—is a strong element in binding the narrative's different strands together. And it is underpinned by the use of music, for whether alone or in pairs the characters are inseparable from the sounds which reach them from disc jockey Wolfman Jack's all-night radio show. (Terry,

about to find solace in the bushes with a girl who bears a passing resemblance to Sandra Dee, deduces that Steve's car has been stolen from the fact that the radio has gone silent.)

Without unnecessary nudging or underlining, Lucas beautifully establishes his characters as both enslaved to the image of themselves which the media have given them and permanently in need of its company. As Laurie opens the snowball waltz with Steve, her emotional pique swells to tragic proportions under the influence of an accompanying ballad about teenage romance. Everyone tries to look like a film star or looks up to someone who has succeeded in looking like one. And it's the discovery that Wolfman is a lonely local whose wild improvisations are painstakingly pre-recorded, and that his dream blonde in the T-Bird is in fact an available call-girl, which strengthens Curt's wavering decision to leave town. The costumes and slang have been mastered, the appurtenances of a particular style of cool acquired, yet the characters often seem desperately in search of an author. There are no songs in vogue which can help with the transition to maturity and independence, and the few adults in sight are unalluringly small fish in a small-town pond. Even the street gang who abduct Curt and threaten him with terrible tortures eventually allow him to wander away, uncertain how to bring the ritual gestures and menaces to an effective climax.

For if the neon night is packed with an unusually high quantity of incidents—each of the four gets at least one of the adventures for which he's vaguely questing—Lucas maintains his overall impression of aimless 'cruising' by stretching the comic awkwardness of every encounter, and developing each event to anticlimax. A hold-up and shooting appear parenthetical to Terry's attempts to obtain liquor for his mock-sophisticated dates. The car in which Laurie rides with an out-of-town dragster crashes in flames, but no one is hurt, the rival drivers relax into friendship, and the emotionally charged reunion with Steve falls short of a perfect fade-out, for the next morning sees him part of the tight-lipped group which waves Curt goodbye as he steps aboard his Magic Carpet flight.

All but the two final sequences are set after dark, and the Techniscope process (with Haskell Wexler as visual consultant) is admirably used to lend a grainy, memory-heightened reality to all the chrome-work, ankle socks and short-sleeved shirts. Yet despite performances by all four boys—Richard Dreyfuss, Ronny Howard, Paul Le Mat, Charlie Martin Smith—convincingly poised between parody and earnest growing pain, and despite the expertise of editing and photography, *American Graffiti* is only half the film its title promises. As an anthology of catch-phrases, early rock hits and *McCalls* magazine attitudes, it's a dazzling and evocative assemblage. It strains into cliché when it tries to make us read a meaning in the writing on the wall.

JAN DAWSON

## The Three Musketeers

*The Three Musketeers* has been filmed so often by so many directors since Edison's 1911 version of the Dumas classic that it all but constitutes a genre in itself. Richard Lester's version is certainly as good as any of the previous attempts and, where it succeeds, probably better than most. There has been an element of spoofing in most versions: Fred Niblo's film in 1921 had the outrageous acrobatic swashbuckling of Fairbanks; Allan Dwan's 1939 musical had the surprisingly amusing Ritz Brothers as D'Artagnan's bumbling friends; and in 1948, MGM's George Sidney allowed Gene Kelly to chew a slice or two of Fairbanks ham. Perhaps this tongue-in-cheek attitude is a necessary part of



filming the *Musketeers*; certainly, the straight 1936 version of Rowland V. Lee is by no means easy to sit through.

Lester's *The Three Musketeers* (Fox-Rank) is well within the tradition of this part of the swashbuckling sub-genre. Although there is none of the fragmented narration through editing which one usually associates with Lester—perhaps because the film was shot with multiple cameras in the television manner—the fragmentation through anarchic humour of a serious world view remains part of the Lester method. There is a constant rush of jokes on every level, from the traditional slapstick surrounding insanely furious sequences of swordplay to near-whispered comic comment by a set of court dwarves. Characters are conceived as comically larger than life, so that the usually romantic Constance (Raquel Welch) is here beautiful but clumsy—falling down stairs, walking into walls, or catching her foot in a pail of water while being embraced by D'Artagnan (Michael York). Most of the comedy works well. When it doesn't, we are faced with a problem in the modern cinema which must have given Lester, too, more than a few moments of puzzlement as he worked with the material; a problem shared, for example, by Robert Altman in *The Long Goodbye*.

A work like *The Three Musketeers* has at least two facets, one romantically 'serious' and the other rather fantastic adventure. Certainly, as previous versions have indicated, the latter aspect is open to comedy (perhaps necessarily so), whereas the more 'serious' aspects of plot—those concerning Milady de Winter and the Queen's diamonds—are more problematical. One does not, of course, expect a historical/political treatise on the period of Louis XIII and Richelieu. Dumas was not Aldous Huxley, and *The Three Musketeers* is not *Grey Eminence*. One could add that *The Devils* is not *The Devils of Loudun*, something that Lester seems aware of in what looks to be an occasional satiric hit off Russell's film. Still, for the suspense and a rather romantic suspension of disbelief to work, one must take the same romantic intrigue as a necessary given, if only to provide a foundation for the comedy. To undercut the courtly romance is to take the chance that the entire structure will collapse. A comparison of the Preminger *Royal Scandal* with the von Sternberg *Scarlet Empress* demonstrates what can happen when essentially romantic characters are undercut too radically, rather than being used as a springboard and base for the comic conception.

Working within the star system, a director like Sidney had an easier time of it. In spite of the soppy awfulness of his script, he could (more or less) count on Lana Turner bringing with her a romantic myth which would safely remove her part of the tale from comedy (a safe bet, since even when she consciously essayed it, the comic spirit always evaded Lana). Nor, even, was Binnie Barnes allowed by Dwan to get too close to the burlesque of the Ritz Brothers. Lester has no such stars with which to provide, by their personae, a romantic seriousness. Faye Dunaway, a more than competent and often beautiful actress, makes Milady less a stylish courtesan than a somewhat campy *femme-semi-fatale*; but she is not a romantic star in the Turner sense of the term. Lester, therefore, obviously chose to treat the entire tale as comic, undercutting even the English lord's platonic love for the Queen. The dialogue for the most part remains true to the romantic myth (it might be argued that a line like 'It cannot be; I am the wife of the King' cannot be said to be thoroughly removed from the world of the send-up, save that Geraldine Chaplin manages to say it and to stay this side of the comic). But a consciously absurd visual image, like the secret shrine which the Duke has built in homage to his 'divinity', the Queen, makes it nearly impossible to care finally if the Queen's reputation and Peace in the World are

ever saved. Even Richelieu, for all the oddly out-of-tune stolidity with which he is played by Charlton Heston, seems to be surrounded at the Bastille by henchmen and torturers who are comically incompetent rather than sinister.

Yet, all of this being duly noted, what might seem to be a disastrous conception of the material works rather well as entertainment. If we must give up our legitimate concern for the Queen, if the King-Richelieu-Milady axis cannot be taken as a serious threat to anyone, if even Constance and D'Artagnan are more lustily anxious than romantic, we are still carried along by the film's furious pace, and what is taken away is at least partially returned to us by some audaciously fresh comedy. If one gag does not come off, there is another following fast on its heels which does. The film is also often stunning to watch. Even if Lester is, indeed, having a bit of fun with the excesses of Russell, the huge sets and pretty costumes are none the less sensuously appealing. Probably because of the emphasis on editing in his previous films, Lester's compositional abilities have been unjustly overlooked. If his frames were, before, composed to fit into a jigsaw arrangement, they are now composed carefully for their own sake. For whatever reasons of necessity or choice, the unfragmented narrative approach works with the material here—just as, unfortunately, the usual Lester fragmentation worked against the material of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

*The Three Musketeers* is not a great film, but it is entertaining, and it is Richard Lester's best work in years. For all its problems, it marks a happy return for a director who, in the interim, seems to have lost none of his *élan du coeur*.

DAVID L. OVERBEY

## The Day of the Dolphin

For about the first hour, given plenty of opportunity to dabble in atmospheres aside from the plot, Mike Nichols develops *The Day of the Dolphin* (Avco-Embassy) as an effective and pessimistic fable on the inadequacy of man and the sufficiency of the beasts; when the plot thickens with a rush in the last forty-five minutes, he winds it up as a glibly sour and sentimental thriller. The opening shot is the director's trademark: in large close-up against curtained darkness, Dr. Jake Terrell (George C. Scott) addresses the camera, lecturing a women's club audience (for the moment unseen) on the unique capacities of the dolphin. His invitation to marvel at its other-worldliness is the cue for a slow-motion shot of a dolphin arching out of the water in rhapsodic play with a silent group of human observers. As the lecture continues, the intercutting to the dolphin takes on a sinister edge, with the men looming ominously against the perfect blue of the surrounding sea while they put Terrell's creature of 'instinct and energy' through the ABCs of human reasoning. The doctor's talk ends with his irritated parrying of questions about the military applications of his research; and one of the men seen in the shots of the dolphin experiments, the bogus journalist Mahoney (Paul Sorvino), is then glimpsed among the audience, an ironic onlooker.

In markedly controlled, confident style, Nichols proceeds to elaborate on the mood of this opening sequence before bothering to explicate much of the plot. From the lecture, Terrell returns to his fortress paradise, on the way arguing finances with Harold DeMilo (Fritz Weaver), director of the foundation which backs his research, the two men continuing

'The Three Musketeers'





their wrangle out-of-doors in images burned out by a harsh white light. Terrell escapes aboard his launch ('Erewhon II') and arrives at his island station, a conglomeration of concrete tanks softly illuminated at dusk. Now apparently king in his own domain, Terrell is soon expressing his displeasure at finding the prize dolphin, Alpha, unattended, his assistants gathered round his injured wife: 'I go away for one lousy afternoon and the whole place falls apart.' Quickly abandoning his wife for Alpha's tank, Terrell conducts an erotic *pas de deux* with the ecstatic dolphin; and through Nichols' peculiar romanticism he becomes a character in transit, marooned between two worlds as he attempts both to share the dolphin's delight in pure sensation and to annex the creature to his scientist's notion of 'infinite possibility'. Also, given the cutting back to Mrs. Terrell alone in the dimly lit cave of the house, and the later hymns to the instinctive communication between Alpha and his assigned mate, Beta, the film does have a sticky ecological layer à la *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

The isolation and obsessiveness of Terrell and his experiments, the precariousness of his ideal marriage of man and animal, are emphasised through Nichols' repetition of simple visual motifs. Again against the background of the wide, sparkling sea, the outside world continues its machinations in the offices of the Franklin Foundation, with the enigmatic Mr. Mahoney mysteriously blackmailing DeMilo into allowing him a visit to Terrell's island. Again picked out against the surrounding darkness, Terrell, celebrating with his team Alpha's re-acquisition of the gift of speech, hints gloomily, 'They're sneaking up on us.' And Nichols cuts to a shot of the launch bearing Mahoney and his assistant as spies on an unknown mission, gliding out of the night. In transit between rather more mundane worlds, Mahoney is literally given rough passage on his first visit to the island, where he is frozen out by Terrell's suspicious team; but his cheery assurance that they are all on the same side turns out to be more than bluff with his final appearance and demonstration that the real villain is the Franklin Foundation: the sleekly powerful Harold DeMilo making his trips to the island by seaplane and casually admiring the paradise he is going to destroy.

Given the film's completely personal focus on political deceit and betrayal, the satire of the last half comes out strangely, with Nichols converting the ominous figures who threaten Terrell's little island of security into caricatures of right-wing plotters (and incidentally con-

verting the dolphins into something equally ignoble and cynically sentimental, as they are first enlisted in and then foil a plot to blow up the Presidential yacht). Buck Henry's adaptation of Robert Merle's novel has usefully planed away a good deal of coy detailing in the personal lives of the scientists, but has made rougher work of the book's social and political satire. As a kind of latter-day de Tocqueville, Merle creates a disarming comedy around the public discovery of the phenomenon of talking dolphins: 'They [psychologists] discovered that at some of their parties, which took place at night in private swimming pools and which had an initiatory quality, teenagers swam in the nude, straddling rubber dolphins and chanting Negro spirituals in which the Lord's name was replaced by Fa's.' Nichols and Henry have refined all this away to a simple, implausible drama of wheels within wheels, of secret government agencies chasing each other's tails and crushing the individual in the process. Mahoney's final confession to being, still somewhat obscurely, one of 'the watchers who watch the watchers', fits in with the mood of the film but leads with very little logic to the veritable cartoon of a political thriller which follows.

Characterised, like *Carnal Knowledge*, by Nichols' particular variety of confessional monologue, with its admissions of defeat and despair, *The Day of The Dolphin* reasserts its initial mood in the final shot. With the plot against the President foiled, and Alpha and Beta sent back to the sea, Terrell and his wife wait silently for whatever may come, their island gradually losing colour and definition as the screen burns out to white.

RICHARD COMBS

## Company Limited

Satyajit Ray has agreed with interviewers that his films recently have become 'more political'. And to some extent, rather sadly, one notes that 'more political' means 'more obvious'. There is really not much less political awareness in *Charulata* and *Kanchenjunga* than in *The Adversary* and *Company Limited*, but Ray then allowed the general to be glimpsed through the particular. These days, understandably in view of his own attitudes and those the Indian left have shown towards him, a kind of general precept tends to be laid down early on. The actual result is not so very different: in both *The Adversary* and *Company Limited*, there's

a sense of some ground being cleared, and then a switch clicks and the films move into that delicately shaded Ray territory of conscience and humour. What is yielded, perhaps, is some of the satisfaction of surprise.

*Company Limited* (Contemporary) opens with a pre-credits first-person narrative. Shyamal Chatterjee (Barun Chanda) is the young man of half a dozen Ray films—with a difference. Like Apu and his successors, Shyamal owes his start to education. But where the student in *Kanchenjunga* turned away from the success ladder, and the boy in *The Adversary* fled the city, Shyamal has gone the other way: buoyantly and happily, he has turned himself into the almost complete company man. The price of the company flat and the company car is the dapper, warily deferential manner of a success symbol on the way up. In the early scenes you have the feeling that Shyamal is playing the lead in a charade—all those endless 'good mornings' and the forced office chatter—and that Ray is assisting him, with such devices as the uncharacteristic cut from the inevitable Indian train to executive jet transport. The question is, how far Shyamal knows it's a charade. Ray of course does; and comes up with an exquisite little joke. We follow a Rolls through the city; it draws up, the chauffeur leaps out to hold the door, and no one emerges. The passenger, an astoundingly garrulous old buffer whose proudest memory is that he once managed to entangle Auchinleck's advance in red tape, is sleeping like a dormouse.

Shyamal's crisis of conscience, if that isn't too emphatic a name for it, is double-edged. His sister-in-law Tutul (Sharmila Tagore) comes to stay, half expecting to find him spoiled by success. Self-consciously, he spreads out for her his proud possessions; she's genuinely impressed, but also quizzical, languidly amused, liable at any minute to withdraw into some private centre of conscience and scruple. When a problem comes up in his work, Shyamal is quite aware that she would disapprove of what he proposes to do; but he never really hesitates. Stuck as sales manager with a dud consignment of electric fans for export, and a penalty clause if they're not delivered on time, he invokes *force majeure* in the form of artfully fomented labour trouble and a lock-out, so letting the company off the hook of the penalty clause. His reward is a directorship; and Tutul's unspoken—presumably never to be spoken—regret.

Shyamal thinks he is proposing something rather monstrous, but is reassured when his tricky little confederate, the personnel manager, insists that it's nothing out of the way. He is jolted when he realises that a bomb can't go off in a factory without hurting someone; but a little later is letting his fellow-plotter joke about the kind of wreath they'd have sent if the man had died. The company man's dilemma is that he would like to have his cake and eat it—to do the wrong but rewarding thing and to retain Tutul's moral approval. He is in his office listening to a radio jingle when the bomb goes off miles away in the factory. His confederate is skulking around (Ray, who has previously made the character despicably human, shoots him at this moment like some old-fashioned caricature of an *agent provocateur*). Someone else, unseen, is doing the dirty work.

From the way he shoots it, one wonders if Ray is much concerned with the detail of industrial machination. What is marvellous in the film is its delicate and funny discoveries about character: Tutul at the races, determined to be disapproving but finding herself caught up in the excitement, Shyamal and his rival blowing fretful cigarette smoke at each other as they wait outside the board room, the ponderous party ('The city is doomed,' someone says) interrupted by the arrival of Shyamal's parents, relics of an older, poorer and more dignified India, who are led through the room and parked like embarrassingly shabby parcels in

'Company Limited': Sharmila Tagore, Parumita Chowdhary





the back quarters. Down below in Calcutta, the bombs are going off. In executive territory, the success game is being played with broken toys—like the madly flickering neon sign, and the telephone that's always out of order. Coming home in triumph, with his directorship achieved, Shyamal finds the lift out of commission and has to puff up endless flights of drab concrete stairway. 'All rising to great place is by a winding stair...' Whether or not something like this was in Ray's mind, it is a beautifully placed moment.

Some critics are disturbed by Ray's 'non-classical' style, here and in *The Adversary*, as though a change of pace meant a betrayal of values. But Ray is also extending his range of observation—range rather than depth—and a more glancing style helps him. The women seen at the racecourse, Tutul's fascinated peep into the hairdresser's shop, the fast drive out into open country: these are among the assets. In the wordless subtlety of close relationships, the tone remains unchanged. Like Bresson, Ray can make you wait, irrationally expectant, while a man simply crosses a room to sit down in another chair. It's a characteristic detail that Tutul finds the books in the flat out of order and threatens to tidy them. Shyamal, the prize English student, has obviously given up reading.

*Company Limited* is about the insecurity of possessions as well as the insecurity of standards. The room Shyamal is so proud of is empty, we're left looking at the way he wants to live, and there's a quietly rushing wind on the soundtrack like a sound from nowhere threatening to blow it all away. As the camera moves round, we see, prosaic but disquieting, the open window and the blowing curtains. The effect is like the stillness before the explosion in *Zabriskie Point*. A servant comes in to shut the window; the explosions are still some way off.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

## Nada

In a blue silk dressing-gown royally patterned in gold, the Minister of the Interior sits in his salon watching television. Just for a moment, as his private secretary hurries in to inform him that a terrorist group has kidnapped the American ambassador in Paris, he and his lady, her white hair piled high in a discreet pompadour, are waxwork echoes of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette learning that the mob is at the gates. Seconds later, as a helicopter lands in front of the chateau to whisk the Minister off to deal with the crisis, floodlights illuminate the façade of the building as though it were a *monument historique* for public delectation.

This superb gloss—the irony, of course, is that nothing in the state's machiavellian handling of the situation will bear public scrutiny—is almost the only flourish Chabrol has brought to *Nada* (Connoisseur), a hallucinatingly faithful adaptation, scripted by the author himself, of Jean-Patrick Manchette's *Série Noire* thriller. Gone are the serpentine camera movements and brooding half-lights of intention and responsibility one has come to associate with Chabrol. Instead, working brilliantly as a straightforward thriller, the film is shot in a direct, head-on style taken from the book where everything is on the surface, and the transference of guilt is to the spectator forced to take sides by the events themselves. Two policemen stand outside a door ringing the bell as they make a routine check; inside, an unhappy, drug-crazed woman, wife of one of the terrorists (and the reason he became a terrorist: 'Something had to give way: either I'd have killed my wife, or...'), panics because she thinks she is being taken off to an institution. In a flurry of action which is like a slap in the face, she turns straight to the camera, slashes her throat with a razor, and rushes like a hypnotised



'Nada': Maurice Garrel.

Photograph: Roger Corbeau

rabbit to the two policemen, screaming for help: 'I don't want to die!'

Where Chabrol really wipes the floor with Costa-Gavras and shows how the latter fluffed an almost identical subject in *Etat de Siège* (quite apart from the different levels of technical expertise) is in refusing to make easy justifications. His terrorists are a confused, ramshackle bunch: a philosophy teacher (Michel Duchaussoy) beating his brains out in a school for rich kids; a 'fils de famille' (Lou Castel) who can see little but a not unwelcome death through his alcoholic stupor; an ageing veteran of the Maquis, Algeria and Cuba (Maurice Garrel) who seems to have run out of causes; a waiter (Didier Kaminka) trapped between hard work, low wages and a neurotic wife; and an enigmatically uninvolved girl (Mariangela Melato). Their vague, undefined motivations—frustration, despair, curiosity, camaraderie—are pulled shakily together by an equally vague symbol of meaningfulness: the Spaniard (Fabio Testi), picturesquely attired in black from beard to broad-brimmed hat, who infuses them with the long-dead spirit of the anarchists (Dostoevsky nihilist vintage: in a direct echo of Kirilov in *The Possessed*, the Algeria-Cuba veteran turns to stare into a mirror after the Spaniard invites him to join the gang, holds a gun to his head, and mutters, 'Might just as well shoot myself right now').

All the more explosive for their ideological uncertainty, the NADA group are presented without complaisance. The kidnapping of the ambassador, from a top people brothel (a typical Chabrol joke has the ambassador, glimpsed previously with his wife at a ballet which ends with two cymbals clashing ominously over the lead dancer, breathing an ecstatic 'Salome!' as his whore does a dance of the one veil), entails the killing of two policemen, one finished off with that familiar weapon from police-demonstrator clashes, a catapult. Their manifesto to the press not only proclaims their goal of ridding France of its 'representatives of order', stating that if their demands are not met the ambassador will be murdered, but also appeals to the public to join in, choosing their own statesman, cop, priest or artist for elimination. The ambassador, 'exceptionally', will not be harmed provided the ransom is paid, because the money is needed to finance future eliminations. They get, in other words, precisely what they ask for when the police open fire with a hail of bullets which rivals *Bonnie and Clyde* and—peculiarly horrifyingly—blows a hutchful of rabbits to smithereens.

But the film undermines reactions by demon-

strating that, however wrongheadedly, however reprehensibly, the NADA group are on the side of life against an insidious, creeping rigor mortis. In spite of the monstrosity of the situation, normality reasserts itself at the hide-out with disarming, unforced innocence: the alcoholic dozing in the sun, huddled like a puppy in a nest of straw; the touchingly fumbling, disappointed affair between the veteran and the girl; the sense of friendship, complicity, pride in the new day they may be making. Against this, and against the proud banner of loyalty still flying at the end between the Spaniard and the philosopher (who has opted out for reasons of conscience), are set the cold, calculating machinations of the forces of order.

Done with Chabrol's derision at full stretch (some wonderful type-casting here), the moves in the game are all the more chilling in that the pawns in the hierarchy accept, ruefully but obediently, that as pawns they may be sacrificed as the price of maintaining some undefined *status quo*. Like a crossword puzzle filled in by an invisible hand, the solutions emerge through a welter of awkward revelations—Special Branch has infiltrated Counter-Espionage; Counter-Espionage is said to have a film of the kidnapping but won't release it unless...; and in a laconic report we learn that the 'unless', the release from jail of a political-masonic leader, has been granted 'on grounds of health'—in a squalid exhibition of political haggling which rings all too true, right down to the Minister's tactful decision not to use the C.R.S. (the anti-riot squads who distinguished themselves in May 1968) so that another police department can carry the eventual can for a change. And that solution: total extermination of the NADA group; suppression of the facts so that public opinion will swing the right way; plus the bonus that the death of the ambassador, almost certain once the police attack, will bring distinct political advantage.

*Nada* is a tough film, all the more so in that it refuses to pledge its heart unequivocally to the Left. 'State terrorism and leftist terrorism, although their aims are different, are the twin jaws of the same trap,' says the Spanish anarchist at the end (now, for reasons of plot, wearing a white pullover); but he—and the film—leave one in no doubt that it is not the principle that is wrong but the practice. Something is rotten in the state of France. As Chabrol says in the epigraph he adds to the film, 'Being a product of the imagination, this story is by no means unimaginable.'

TOM MILNE



## Payday

A straggler from the days before the American popular cinema gave itself over to vicious cops, private armies and car chases, *Payday* (Fox-Rank) emerges as a kind of footnote to the cycle of movies on the souring of the American Dream. In the wake of the questing hippies, dissident students, motel cowboys and middle-aged misfits comes the egocentric red-neck drop-out, whose particular version of the Dream is superficially a matter of material success as a country music star, but at heart the usual desperate longing for emotional fulfilment. This time the loner (while seeking to exploit it) is insulated from his society by a more or less sycophantic entourage, and so his inevitable crash is more an inner collapse than a social collision: at the end of a road littered with hushed-up scandals, strained loyalties and broken friendships, his heart and mind peg out in unison. The genre's final step from this least sympathetic of 'heroes' to the well-intentioned cop of *Electra Glide in Blue* was clearly a small one.

The roads here are Southern and they are travelled by twin Cadillacs connected by intercom; the small convoy ferries country- and western ballad singer Maury Dann (Rip Torn) from one town to the identical next on a heavy schedule of one-night-stands and promotional plugs. Dann's conscious aspirations match his manager's: the Johnny Cash Show, a major Nashville record contract, fame, fortune and retirement from the road. But the lifestyle that he adopts to soften the hard road to stardom creates more problems than it solves: his subsistence diet of uppers and Southern Comfort between stop-over burgers and steaks wrecks him physically as surely as his cavalier attitude to devoted colleagues and lovers does emotionally. The crisis is precipitated by a drunken stranger who dies on his own knife in a fight after accusing Dann of seducing his girl; Dann's revering chauffeur Chicago (Cliff Emmich) takes the rap for manslaughter, but the psychological repercussions of the squalid affair push the precarious group past breaking point. Like many care-fraught predecessors from Jack Nicholson's Bobby Dupea to the Kansas City Bomber herself, Dann compulsively returns to neglected members of his family in search of 'roots' or understanding, invariably to find his frustrations compounded by the encounters. Don Carpenter's script amplifies this steady degeneration by presenting it as a corrosive influence on ingénue groupie Rosamond (Elayne Hildeve), picked up by one of the band at the start, then displacing Mayleen (Ahna Capri) as Dann's 'regular', and finally, too many horrors later, wanting only to 'go home'.

The elements of *déjà-vu* in the theme and plot—apart from the clichés of the road, Dann's characterisation echoes the petty tyrants of more than a few showbiz movies—are minor irritations, though, beside the depressing complacency of Daryl Duke's visual style. Every shot in the movie, from the nervously intercut close-ups of the opening sequences in and around a club where the band are playing a gig to the concluding crane shot of the wreckage of Dann's car (accompanied, lest the irony be understated, by one of Dann's songs about keeping on life's sunny side) is predictable; scarcely one evidences any fresh response to the particular demands of this script. Such consistent recourse to convention is especially sad to see in a first feature. None the less, Carpenter's ear for dialogue and the little-known cast's way with it breathe a degree of life into even the most stock characters and situations; and these qualities, taken with the obviously authentic depiction of the Southern music business, give the film much the same down-home feel that *J. W. Coop* boasted as its prime virtue.

A few scenes are outstanding, even if some

(like Chicago's intense exchanges with Rosamond about his passion for cooking) are too self-consciously placed as showpieces. Most unreservedly successful are those designed to show just how much of a bastard Dann can be; witness his ditching of Mayleen after she has indulged in one bitchery too many. She is unceremoniously dumped by the roadside in the back of beyond, but the car reverses and Dann tosses a bankroll through the window to her. The car pulls away, then stops and reverses again. Dann gets out, but only to retrieve the money. 'You didn't earn it.'

TONY RAYNS

## The Exorcist

The *Exorcist* phenomenon already looks like outstripping the *Godfather* phenomenon at the box-office, and has similarly conjured up a spectre in the public imagination which is currently dispossessing the film itself. In a flurry of commentary, including a cover article in *Newsweek*, the image of the exorcist and his demonic adversary is being annexed to a variety of sociologically related topics: the increasingly violent eruption of current fears and confusions; growing fascination with the supernatural and cults of the irrational; and the struggle between good and evil, given a charge of superstitious dread and grotesquely paralleled with schizophrenic breakdown.

Writer William Peter Blatty has put perhaps the most prosaic interpretation on the intensity of audience responses: 'I think that they are making the unconscious connection between that repulsive monstrosity on the screen and the moral evil in their lives, like stealing from their brother and calling it business.' Regan MacNeil and her infernal alter ego evidently take on a meaning beyond their immediate context and, like Frankenstein's monster, may even return to the screen in other impersonations. That *The Exorcist* will be remembered solely for having unleashed such a magnificently 'repulsive monstrosity' seems assured by the controversy over who—between the 12-year-old girl who played the victim and the actresses who variously dubbed in the voice and the body for her more frenzied degradations—deserves most credit for its creation.

So much of *The Exorcist* (Columbia-Warner) appears, in fact, to have been constructed simply to enhance the emotional impact of this diabolic vision, while the specific nature of its attack on everyone except the girl, and the religious context in which it is fought, are frustratingly skimmed. The film moves, at the random dictates of the plot, through dis-

'Payday'



connected changes of atmosphere which alternately emphasise the banal and the sinister, while never managing to make even central characters seem more than peripheral to the creation of a satanic mood piece. In his novel, Blatty camouflaged a loose and cumbersome construction by over-supplying any number of identifying tags and poetic little comments on his characters. William Friedkin's equivalent for this kind of emphasis (with Blatty acting as producer as well as scriptwriter, the film is faithful in detail to the book) is the over-direction of the mood-setting sequences, as if the links between them could be established merely by force of suggestion.

In a prologue set in Iraq, the exorcist, Jesuit Father Merrin (Max von Sydow), is introduced as a palaeontologist conducting an archaeological dig and turning up some relics—a carved head, a silver medallion—of ancient devil worship. 'Evil against evil,' mutters the Father as he ponders the presence of an old enemy. And Friedkin quite effectively turns the screws on the prospect of their coming conflict through the hypnotic, doom-laden rhythms of the action.

Merrin then disappears from the film as the scene shifts to Washington and an even more prolonged bout of atmosphere-building: the homely intimacy of actress Chris MacNeil (Ellen Burstyn) and her daughter Regan (Linda Blair), before the latter is infested by the demon whose presence (thumpings in the attic) is at first rather implausibly taken for rats. When Merrin reappears, summoned as a last resort when the creature that has taken over Regan's body, and the host of the dead that he has brought with him, can be exorcised neither by medical science looking for damage to the 'frontal lobe' nor by psychiatrists trying to unearth a hidden personality, Friedkin cuts in a shot of the Jesuit, black-cloaked, arriving by taxi on a misty night. The shot inevitably looks like a cheap horror tactic, and the film continually struggles to suggest through atmosphere what it promises but fails to provide in substance. The conflict of faith between priest and demon (briefly indicated in the book as a manic dialogue, with the creature answering Merrin's incantations with accusations of self-righteousness) becomes a darkly uncharacterised contest with malign forces capable, through spectacular special effects, of spectacular physical feats.

Similarly, the crisis of faith suffered by the younger priest, Damien Karras (Jason Miller), who is first approached on the subject of exorcism by the distraught mother, is never satisfactorily integrated with the spiritual battle supposedly going on at the centre of the film, and is finally only exploited in a *deus ex machina* conclusion, which has Karras both resolve his crisis and complete the exorcism by taking the demon on himself and leaping from the bedroom window. The priest's guilt over the lonely death of his mother provokes another arbitrary connection: the medallion found in Iraq floats through a dream in which Karras vainly attempts to reach the old woman; an icon of the obscure forces of faith which seems to have been planted by an artificial logic having little to do with the chance connections of dream. Even a character who might have been deliberately conceived as an outsider, the police lieutenant (Lee J. Cobb) who dolefully intrudes on the household as an emissary from a larger world of worry, comes across as more exterior to the main action than the film at times hints that he should.

Piecemeal in its construction, *The Exorcist* plods faithfully through the catalogue of incident in a less than perfect original. It suggests, rather like *Rosemary's Baby*, that the cinema's special sleight of hand—though displayed here with horrific skill—is still rather less lucky than the printed word at making vague suggestiveness cover a multitude of sins.

RICHARD COMBS



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I remember Cavalcanti's advice to a student at UCLA—'If the people at the Suicide Prevention Center (in Los Angeles) won't let you shoot the patients, cast people who look ready to jump.'

The successful documentaries of the Thirties and Forties more often than not used the devices of fiction and made many of the same aesthetic assumptions. That was what cinema was to the people—anything else would have looked unreal. But since the age of television, common sense views of what is 'real' in images have changed.

'When shooting Westerns, use real Indians if possible, but if Indians are not available, use Hungarians.' Ricky Leacock, the centre of this book by *Le Monde* critic Louis Marcorelles, found this advice in a classic American text on lighting. With the story, Marcorelles establishes the polarity between Godard and Leacock, two of the cinema's avant-garde in the Fifties and Sixties. Godard uses Laszlo Szabo as an Arab in *Le Petit Soldat* and *Weekend*. The issue is not just one of authenticity, although that is a factor which interests the audience, but rather of what is the proper subject of a film, and of how films get made.

Godard works out of his imagination, through someone else's camera—not just any cameraman but one who will give him the surface feeling of actuality. Leacock works directly with his subject, using the camera himself, and making totally different choices and decisions because of his different relationship to the subject. Godard analyses the idea of his film and imagines a situation for it; Leacock analyses the situation of his film and looks for ways to reveal its structure.

As a critic, Marcorelles writes about all kinds of film. But his preferences have always been clear. He popularised the work of Free Cinema and championed Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz even when they left documentary behind. He has especially followed and supported the development of Richard Leacock (and his cohorts Pennebaker and Maysles), Pierre Perrault (and other elements of the new French-

Canadian cinema) and Jean Rouch (and other French film-makers who followed the line of direct cinema). In the first part of this present book he argues that classical cinema, with its dependence on literary or dramatic scripts, performed by actors, has run out of steam, and he suggests reasons for it—esthetic, cultural and political.

It is a brief book, as he admits. Little more than an introduction. But it contains some essential elements. One of these is the change that the use of light, synchronous equipment has made to the quality of the images in films. The shot in the silent cinema could be used as an element in a montage without consideration being given to what sound existed when that shot was taken. Thus it could be independent of any anchor to a precise, concrete event, and could be exploited for its metaphorical value. In direct cinema (the term Marcorelles prefers to *cinéma vérité*) the sound is taken with the shot and the two are considered together in the editing. Thus within the fabric of the original camera material there is more dependence on the structure of the event than on the impulse of an idea.

He is correct to put Leacock at the centre of his book. *Happy Mother's Day* (Quint City, USA) was one of the first films to follow through an event analytically with the camera, first of all getting things clearly and without ambiguity and then putting together the elements necessary for an understanding of what was happening in that little town in South Dakota which hit the jackpot with the live birth of quintuplets. The skill involved in that kind of shooting (and recording) is made obvious every time you see a television documentary with its chopped up sequences and its obligatory scenes missing or incomplete, lapses of understanding at the time covered by commentary which makes us suspicious of the rest. But Leacock has also anticipated much of the argument and analysis that has to be provided, if we are to determine what difference it makes to film-makers (and to audiences) if you abandon the pre-digested script in favour of an analysis of the situations being filmed which continues throughout shooting, and which deals satisfactorily with the relationship between the film-makers and the people being filmed.

The problems have been worrying us for some time—always in

the face of concrete problems where the film-makers have not been helped by McLuhan's partial understanding of cinema, or by the structuralists' indecent haste to apply something to film when they had not yet studied film with great enough sympathy for its diversity. There have been many groups—around the Canadian Film Board, both in the English and French sections, the ethnographic field, especially around Cambridge (Massachusetts) and UCLA and, of course, the Musée de l'Homme, and with Ian Dunlop and Roger Sandall in Australia.

There has never been any shortage of problems. What new disciplines have to be learned when you wish the film to act as evidence of its own making and of the subject being filmed? How does credibility (authenticity) in a film substitute for dramatic tension? Assuming the aesthetic problems are solved, do the films fit obviously into the normal distribution patterns? Roger Graef faced this problem, more or less successfully, in his *Space Between Words* series. Craig Gilbert got his show *An American Family* on NET (in twelve one-hour episodes) but almost as if none of the debate about *cinéma vérité* over the last ten years had occurred. Too bad he and his cameraman (Alan Raymond) hadn't read Marcorelles' book first.

The book is not all about Leacock, although it easily could have been, nor is it enough about Rouch, who also deserves a book

of his own. Rouch begins with the advantage of being a trained anthropologist who never starts filming from scratch, like a journalist on assignment. But his mixture of observation, invention and post-recording cannot be dealt with adequately within the same framework as the rest of direct cinema; and Marcorelles, after indicating that he knows what the problems are, wisely leaves them to another day.

He spends more time with Pierre Perrault of Quebec, whose work I know less well, after the splendid *Pour la Suite du Monde* which he made with Michel Brault. Marcorelles makes the distinction between Leacock and Perrault in the following way: 'I should like to define Leacock as the technician of 'new cinema', the anti-Hitchcock, because of his categorical rejection of the old cinematographic 'grammar' . . . and Perrault as the ideological thinker of this 'new cinema', the anti-Antonioni, because of his refusal to crush his characters under a kind of existential destiny . . .'

Also in the first part of the book are essays on political cinema and, especially, the Third World cinema. These are connected to Marcorelles' main thesis, not because they are all examples of *direct cinema*, but because they illustrate for him different ways in which the spoken word takes precedence over the image in organising a film. He has no interest in filmed radio, of



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some factual information  
trying to get out. . . .  
Most of it gets into the

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course, what we describe in British television as 'talking heads'. In fact he clearly accepts Leacock's distinction between what we learn from an interview and what we learn by observation.

Some people can't adequately be observed by the camera and tape-recorder running synchronously—they present only the official view of themselves. For some time (following the famous 1963 Lyons meeting of the new documentarists) there was an embargo on interviews in *cinéma vérité*, for this reason; but also because the willingness to interview suppressed the obligation to look for alternative ways of gathering information. Now filmmakers (following Leacock and Perrault) are willing to have conversations with people. This involves an important switch in tactics and in overall aesthetic strategy. When someone speaks to the camera for interview, it is clear he is being put on the spot and, if he's sensible, he'll give a performance, unless caught off guard. But when a cameraman and recordist have been accepted in a situation to be doing their work while their subjects do theirs, it follows that from time to time the film crew may be included in the conversation.

For this never once to have happened in twelve hours of broadcast film in *An American Family* is astonishing and depressing. Maybe the English subjects of Roger Graef's series were happy to have Charles Stewart disappear into the wallpaper (but I wonder about the schoolteacher), but Americans, especially Californians, talk to everyone who comes into the room. Bill Loud admits during a Dick Cavett talk show (over American television) that having a film crew around is a little bit like having a maid—there are certain things you don't say, but the relationship in fact demands that you go on doing what you would have done anyway. But never once to be seen looking at the camera, or talking to the crew?

Godard knows that the proscenium arch has often to be stripped away from the camera frame—those astonishing moments in Anna Karina's conversation in *Vivre sa Vie* with Brice Parain. Leacock knows the problem from the other side of the arch; and to his credit, Marcorelles has got very close to the cultural situation within which Leacock (and again Perrault) has been working. I get the feeling that he is not so close to the Third World cultures, but he at least worries about that and about the huge technological and theoretical gaps which have developed between the over-developed and the under-developed film countries. By and large there seems to be a 'French' view of the Latin-American cinema (at least their critics have taken the trouble to formulate one), and I hope Marcorelles will spend longer on that subject too some day.

I am less interested in the second

part of the book, where he tries to develop an approach to what he calls 'concrete cinema', drawing the term from *musique concrète*. I wouldn't have thought there is all that much in common between the work of Pierre Schaefer's extraordinary experimental group at ORTF and the New American Cinema—each of which is treated in this section. And I get no help at all from Nicole Rouzet-Albagli's chapter on 'Technique and Work'.

How to sum up? This short book, maddeningly short, would not have existed at all if it had not been, in an earlier incarnation, commissioned by UNESCO—presumably by the indefatigable Enrico Fulchignoni, who has brought so many good people together. But it should be much longer. It runs the risk of seeming like a text of encouragement to the lonely innovators and not developed enough to turn people's heads. But at any moment of change (and in the cinema all moments are like that) films and criticism must be looked at together. Anyone reading this book and looking at the films discussed cannot help but get more out of the films and out of films in general. Somebody has to find Marcorelles the time to write more. Like a good documentary film-maker, he clearly has the confidence of his subjects.

On the whole Isabel Quigley's translation is good. Some odd words creep in—e.g. *structuration*—and occasionally I guess that the French meant something a little different. Nevertheless, what a useful thing to have done.

COLIN YOUNG

## THE ART OF WALT DISNEY

By Christopher Finch

NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY, £15.00

A vast coffee-table book—but any book that manages to open the notoriously secretive Disney archives is more than welcome. The cover blurb maintains that this is the 'only full account to have benefited from free access . . .'—a claim also made by R. D. Field's 1942 volume of the same title—and both works for whatever reason verge close to performing a straight PR job at times. Though Finch's text may do little to demolish the question mark that some may feel should follow the title, the visual evidence to support 'art' status is certainly plentiful. The book bulges with excellently reproduced frame blow-ups, preparatory colour sketches, background layouts and movement diagrams relating to the complete 50-year history of Disney shorts and features. From the first *Laugh-O-Gram* title (c. 1922) to the recent *Robin Hood* (1973), taking in the *Nature* series and live action films en route.

The account of Disney's early career adds little to the previous 'unofficial' biographies, and does nothing to debunk the lovingly perpetuated sacred myths; so the story of Walt's invention of

Mickey Mouse on an overnight train (having just lost the rights to Oswald the Lucky Rabbit in New York) is dutifully, if non-committally re-aired. Ub Iwerks, Mickey's true creator, is doubtless turning in his grave and muttering 'Bullshit'—the only word he ever had to say on the subject. Still, the role Iwerks played in moulding the studio's early style is credited here at last, and his astonishing energy testified to in the account of his single-handed animation of the whole of the first Mickey Mouse film, *Plane Crazy*, in 1928.

To the TV-educated animation fan, the chapters on the early colour shorts ('Six Cartoon Classics', etc.) will be something of a revelation. No other studio has ever equalled the attention to detail and colour harmony of Disney's 1930s background art work, and the clarity and complexity of the movements described by his characters. This ability to create clearer-than-real action was an essential factor in the development of recognisable and consistent personality in the Disney characters, which Finch regards as the main reason for their enormous popularity.

Certainly character and physical substance—the ability to express *weight* in real terms (as Dick Williams has observed) made possible a richness of comic invention previously unseen in animation. But it was gained at the expense of the purely kinetic humour that *Steamboat Willie* and the other early black and white works depended on so heavily. Elsewhere, Disney has been quoted as condemning this graphic expressionism as being too 'fussy' and confusing to audiences. Yet his continued flirtation with abstraction in *Fantasia* (1940), *Make Mine Music* (1946), and the astonishing matted dance sequence in *The Three Caballeros* (1945) suggests that at least occasionally he felt inhibited by the continuing drift into 'realism'.

Finch's account of the origins of the storyboard system largely substantiates Disney's claim to authorship of most of the works produced before the mid-1950s. The storyboard allowed the problems of each film to be dealt with in specific detail before any cells were inked, and Walt, as Dick Heumer reports, 'always had the answers. He would go right to the middle of the problem and there would be this nugget that he'd pull out. Damnedest thing! You'd kick yourself and say "Why didn't I see it?"' But perhaps the major revelation of this section of the book is the visual evidence, credited for the first time, of the extent to which Albert Hurter and Gustav Tenggren were responsible for the 'gothic' styling of Disney's two undisputed masterpieces, *Snow White* (1937) and *Pinocchio* (1940), and many of the 1930s *Silly Symphonies*.

Outside the studio either of these artists might have achieved personal fame as illustrators in a Norman Rockwell/Arthur Rackham vein, but both remained

loyally with Disney; Hurter's death signalling the beginning of a decline in feature layout design in the late 1940s. Again, on the strength of credited drawings, one can identify Fred Moore as the villain who destroyed the perfect symmetry of Mickey's head (by giving him 'cheeks') in pursuit of greater plastic expression. The crediting of other animators' work is infuriatingly sparse; references to individual styles in the text are seldom related to specific illustrations, despite the author's access to veterans from even the earliest days. Any critical notions these animators had, their feelings about the famous strike of 1941, and the reasons for the breakaway formation of the UPA studios all go unrecorded.

In the discussion of a process-dominated art form, it seems extraordinary that the aesthetic implications of the techniques involved should be ignored. Rotoscoping (the tracing of live-action as a model for animation, perfected by Max Fleischer and brilliantly used in his *Ko-Ko* series in the early 1920s) is surely central to consideration of the figure of Snow White and her 'human' successors. Likewise the time-honoured (and now much-abused) use of cycles of animation (the 'looping' of drawings to extend action), is responsible for much of the rhythmic structuring of the silent and early sound films. Even Disney's greatest technological contribution to the Art—the Multiplane camera—is dismissed in one brief paragraph, leaving untouched such issues as the difference between the wholly *drawn* tracking shot of the conventional rostrum and the *real* (if miniature) track-in-depth of the multiplane.

The omissions go on: *Anthropomorphism*—a term that could have been invented for (if not by) Disney; *Fantasmagoria* (the subject of a remarkable page of drawings in R. D. Field); neither is even mentioned by Finch.

One can but hope that, now a precedent has been set, the Disney archives will begin to encourage access; and that the next release of art-work will be accompanied by a more informative and critically acute assessment.

DAVID CURTIS

## A HERITAGE OF HORROR: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972

By David Pirie

GORDON FRASER, £3.00

Whatever opinion one may hold of the British horror cycle which began, ironically enough, on television with the BBC's *Quatermass* series in 1953, it has produced an extraordinary array of images. Surviving outside the context of the original films, as though all that extra footage had been mere embroidery, these indelible instants of anguish and confrontation seem to define a community in which the accustomed laws are



suspended and only chaos remains. Distorted faces scream and snarl, hooded figures lunge and clutch, and extremes of violence are contemplated with a curious impassivity, as if the hammering of stakes into flesh, the teasing out of eyeballs and the severing of heads were the most commonplace of rituals. The illustrations in David Pirie's survey, tiny as some of them are, provide a constantly disquieting background to his amiable and enthusiastic text. In their company, it seems a contradiction to pursue the rational and academic when the subject is so visibly concerned with the perverse and neurotic.

Mr. Pirie's purpose, however, is to demonstrate that these glimpses of appalling crisis are the legitimate successors to those provided by the Gothic writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—in particular Mrs. Radcliffe with her persecuted women, her foreboding castles and fatal men, M. G. Lewis with his explicit sensuality, bloodletting and necrophilia, and Charles Maturin with his lascivious exploration of degradation and misery. Equally significant, Pirie suggests, is the case of George Selwyn, a sadistic British nobleman who travelled Europe in the 1700s in order to have a front seat at every execution (he died, unfortunately for him, before the French Revolution), thus proving to everyone's satisfaction that there would always be an audience for this kind of thing in England.

An audience, but seldom any pace-setters, thanks to the national characteristic of independence. In time, the Gothic writers were adopted and extended by the Surrealists, but the British preferred to work as individuals rather than as part of a movement, and hence 'it may be that the Hammer-type horror film is one of the more welcome by-products of the English reluctance to embrace artistic systems.' It indicates the extent to which Pirie lacks space to develop his argument that one tends to blink in some disbelief at this suggestion, but it's a bold preparation for the ground he intends to cover, and Hammer Films have quite a lot to thank him for.

Skimming briskly over the earliest Hammer productions, Pirie gets down to some useful considerations of the Quatermass trilogy (*Quatermass II* is 'the greatest British anxiety movie of all') and describes the risk that was taken with *The Curse of Frankenstein*, the first international Hammer hit. Quoting the outraged critics of the time, he defends the film's unrestrained and surgical approach to the Baron's technique by invoking the *Schauer-Romantik* school, which depends on colour and flamboyant detail as well as suspense for its effect, but he seems more at ease when in a chapter on Terence Fisher he is able to examine the whole *Frankenstein* series. We are always being told, mostly by the French, how neglected an *auteur*

Fisher is, and it's refreshing to find the case in his favour being made so eloquently for a change by a British critic.

Pirie seems reluctant to make up his mind whether films like *Dracula*, *Prince of Darkness* are flawed examples of poetic grandeur or surprisingly effective despite their modest pretensions. He wonders if critical objections to a sequence in which a man is suspended over Dracula's ashes and drained of blood 'were perhaps based on a misunderstanding of the whole Dracula myth,' and suggests that Barbara Shelley, being transfixed by a stake, 'has never achieved a more perfect incarnation of the demonic physicality of the vampire,' remarks which again raise more implications than he has space enough to answer. Attempting in the book's later chapters to give more than a passing nod to the surprising range of horror material created by the British cinema, he tends to find such resonant and unsubstantiated phrases unavoidable; he has a high opinion of Roy Ward Baker but gives no example to support it (unless he wants to defend *Singer Not the Song*?); he refers to 'acceptable sexual or grotesque overtones that may easily be detectable behind the "Sadism" of the various Anglo movies' and, tantalisingly, goes no further; and he deals with one of 'the most impressive Hammer debuts ever' (that of Peter Sykes and his fascinating *Demons of the Mind*) in only two sentences. Only with Michael Reeves does the pace relax once more, and Pirie gives valuable guidance on the achievements of this remarkable young director's brief career.

An important introduction, then, to a fresh view of the British cinema, but at the same time a frustrating one. Now that the general surveying has been done, we may hope that David Pirie will return to the area for more specific excavation.

PHILIP STRICK

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

THOMAS R. ATKINS is chairman of the Theatre Arts Department at Hollins College, Virginia, and editor-publisher of *The Film Journal*. He is at present working on a film book to be published by Indiana University Press . . .

DAVID CURTIS was an organiser of the 1973 'Festival of Independent Avant-Garde Film' at the National Film Theatre, and is now writing a thesis on abstract and early figurative animation . . . DAVID GORDON is city editor of *The Economist* . . . LOUIS MARCORELLES is film critic of *Le Monde* and author of the recent book *The Living Cinema*. Is a former Paris correspondent for SIGHT AND SOUND . . . DAVID L. OVERBEY taught film for a number of years at a state college in California. He now lives in Paris, and is currently editing the film scripts of Fritz Lang . . . COLIN YOUNG is Director of the National Film School.

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# Letters

## La Nuit Américaine

SIR,—Truffaut's last two films before his recent, great *La Nuit Américaine*—*Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* and *Une Belle Fille comme Moi*—seem to me not to have been understood by the critics. What is interesting is that these films are blackly pessimistic; in contrast to the great, though guarded, optimism of his ten preceding films. *Les Deux Anglaises* is about the death of nature; *Une Belle Fille* about the death of civilisation. *La Nuit Américaine* completes the trilogy: its theme is the death of the cinema.

It is curious that none of the critics, so far as I know, has referred to the fact that the director in the film, Ferrand, although apparently working in a very Truffaut-like way in other respects, is making precisely the kind of film that Truffaut and his colleagues in the Nouvelle Vague have never made: a big studio production. (We must except *Fahrenheit 451* because it is a fantasy; and it, of course, takes us

out into nature at the end.) To make a successful film, a balance must be kept between reality and illusion. The Nouvelle Vague brought a new realism into film-making; but to them no less than to others, the same rule applies. Ferrand, in *La Nuit Américaine*, is making the more traditional kind of film, depending greatly on illusion; he, too, has to find a balance with reality. This balance we see being destroyed through circumstances quite beyond his control—through the insensitivity and insecurity of his actors. The death of Alexandre underlines the fact that the illusion provided by an actor's performance is dependent on his real presence as a human being.

As a footnote, it is interesting that for Truffaut, as for Balzac, the English way of life appears to symbolise death.

Yours faithfully,  
London, S.W.4. ADAM VERNEY

## The Spirit of the Beehive

SIR,—I feel compelled to express my amazement at the review/critique delivered by John Gillett on *The Spirit of the Beehive* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1973/74). Each viewer is, of course, entitled to a personal interpretation—one of the great joys of art in any form—but an interpretation based on the kind of ignorance John Gillett displays in this case is unforgivable. His reference to the magic words of invocation like

'Soriano Soriano' was actually the child Anna saying 'I am Anna, I am Anna' (Soy Ana, soy Ana). This unfortunate misunderstanding has shaped his entire review into a misrepresentation that would sit better on the pages of a magazine other than the official organ of the British Film Institute.

Altogether an example where a more intelligent approach to content and a less ostentatiously erudite approach to form may have produced a more accurate comment.

Yours faithfully,  
London, N.W.11. JAN MACDONALD

Alas, this is the kind of mistake one can make when trying to review a film from an unsubtitled print seen at a noisy festival screening, with a whispered translation from nearby Spanish colleagues. Even so, it was a silly error: but I hope Mr Macdonald enjoyed the film, if not the review.

JOHN GILLET

## End of the Lion

SIR,—After reading your excellent but disturbing article 'End of the Lion' in the Winter SIGHT AND SOUND I came across a news bulletin that could serve as an epilogue to your report. And I quote: 'If you are a film buff, Las Vegas's MGM hotel is a paradise lost. Every day there you can watch free an old MGM classic like *An American in Paris*.'

Yours faithfully,  
London, S.W.19. GREGORY HANNA

## Madcap Le Grice

SIR,—I am a basket staker at the Basingstoke Co-operative Supermarket. Four times a year, one of my duties is to collect the unopened copies of SIGHT AND SOUND from all the other sales girls. We send these to under-developed countries for use as toilet tissue (although the paper is not really absorbent enough, it does help to ease our consciences a little). This quarter there was not a single copy left in the box on delivery day. I only understood why when Polly Griddle (on check-out) ran up to me excitedly with her virgin pages bared for the first time in many years: 'They have something about real films this time,' she said. Of course I did not believe her at first, but there it was, an article (four whole pages) on the Independent Avant-Garde Festival, by Tony Rainbow. Yes! even written by someone who knows about it. You can imagine the ecstasy which filled our shop for at least an hour or two. However we mellowed a little when we realised what deprivation would be caused in South America if SIGHT AND SOUND were to make a habit of paying attention to this kind of cinema.

Yours faithfully,  
MARY LOU GRACE

P.S. I must correct an error in the article: *Two Minutes 45 Seconds*, a most significant work, was in fact by William Raban and not Chris Wellsby (who none the less also showed some excellent work).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CIC for *The Great Gatsby*, *American Graffiti*, *Serpico*, *Fahrenheit 451*.  
COLUMBIA-WARNER for *The Illustrated Man*, *Magnum Force*, *McQ*.  
FOX-RANK for *Zardoz*, *The French Connection*, *Payday*.  
UNITED ARTISTS for *The Three Musketeers*, *Electra Glide in Blue*.  
EMI for *S\*P\*Y\*S*, *Lucky Luciano*.  
CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Piromani*, *Company Limited*.  
CONNOISSEUR FILMS LA BOETIE for *Nada*.  
FAIR ENTERPRISES for *Chiefs*, photograph of Richard Leacock.  
PARAMOUNT PICTURES for photographs of Karel Reisz and John Schlesinger.  
UNIVERSAL PICTURES for *It Came From Outer Space*, photograph of Don Siegel.  
WARNER BROS. for *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *Moby Dick*.  
WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS for *Orphans' Benefit*, *How to Play Football*, *Lonesome Ghosts*.  
RICHARD WILLIAMS ANIMATION for photograph of Art Babbitt.  
THE AMERICAN FILM THEATRE for *A Delicate Balance*, *The Iceman Cometh*.  
TIME-LIFE BROADCAST/DREW ASSOCIATES for *Football*.  
TIME-LIFE BROADCAST/DREW ASSOCIATES/ALLEN & UNWIN for *Primary*.  
FILMS ARIANE for *Stavisky*.  
MARA-FILMS for *Lancelot du Lac*.  
LES FILMS ROGER LEENHARDT for *Pictures at an Exhibition*.  
CINEVEST-MAXPAL/CINEMA 5 for *A Sense of Loss*.  
TMS FILM for *Ludwig—Requiem for a Virgin King*.  
KAISER FILM for *The Fortuitous Employments of a Slave*.  
SEITZ FILM (Munich)/ALFA/ GLARUS/MFG for *The Pedestrian*.  
IRAN-TV for *The Mongols*.  
LIBERATION FILMS/TONY WICKERT for *Starting to Happen*.  
BFI PRODUCTION BOARD for *My Ain Folk*.  
BFI PRODUCTION BOARD/PETER SMITH for *A Private Enterprise*.  
KEVIN BROWNLOW for *Comrade Jacob*.  
IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM for wartime news pictures.  
R. H. W. DILLARD COLLECTION for Ray Bradbury drawing.  
NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *Sumurun*, *Louisiana Story*.

## CORRESPONDENTS

HOLLYWOOD: Axel Madsen  
ITALY: Giulio Cesare Castello  
FRANCE: Gilles Jacob, Rui Nogueira  
SCANDINAVIA: Ib Monty  
SPAIN: Francisco Aranda  
INDIA: Amita Malik

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# FILM GUIDE

## \*\*AMERICAN GRAFFITI (CIC)

George Lucas trumps Peter Bogdanovich for the loving care (and technological detail) of his re-creation of times past. His lament for adolescence outlived comes a little too glib, however, to carry the intended weight of allegory. (Richard Dreyfuss, Ronny Howard, Paul Le Mat.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*BLOW-OUT (Gala)

Porcile territory: four pillars of society gather for an orgy of *haute cuisine* only to find that their incidental fantasies, fetishes and sexual rivalries lead them to a fateful end. Marco Ferreri treats his 'scandals' all too soberly; a plot composed of deliciously bizarre detail steadily petrifies into allegory. (Marcello Mastroianni, Ugo Tognazzi, Philippe Noiret, Michel Piccoli.)

## \*BOESMAN AND LENA

(Contemporary)  
Athol Fugard's play about two Cape Coloured down-and-outs on the road to nowhere. An oblique but powerful indictment of apartheid in human terms, though the play's concentrated bitterness is diminished by the naturalistic setting. (Yvonne Bryceland, Athol Fugard; director, Ross Devenish.)

## \*\*COMPANY LIMITED

(Contemporary)  
Young Calcutta executive sacrifices scruple to business, while his sister-in-law plays the role of watchful, silent conscience. Ray completes his trilogy about men and jobs with this delicate, sympathetic, often funny account of moral dilemma and mechanical breakdown in the new India. (Sharmila Tagore, Barun Chanda.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*COPS AND ROBBERS

(United Artists)  
Rather cops as robbers, with Cliff Gorman and Joe Bologna graduating from a petty hold-up to the grand Wall Street heist under cover of their police uniforms. Donald Westlake's script races through an inventive plot, anchoring both the humour and the improbabilities in well-observed banalities of police procedure and suburban life-styles. (Director, Aram Avakian.)

## \*\*DAY OF THE DOLPHIN, THE

(Avco Embassy)  
Mike Nichols' film begins as a meditation on dolphins and ends as wild marine melodrama, with the sagacious creatures foiling a plot to blow up the Presidential yacht. A perilous mixture, and a film which keeps hinting at more than it delivers, though there are insights enough to make you see why Nichols embarked on it. (George C. Scott, Trish Van Devere.) *Reviewed.*

## \*DON IS DEAD, THE (CIC)

Richard Fleischer lends rather more style than it deserves to this minor Mafia caper which puts Universal's backlot to use and takes its plot (minor Mafioso makes good) and its sociology (the Syndicate as super-corporation) straight from *The Godfather*. (Anthony Quinn, Frederic Forrest, Al Lettieri.)

## \*EXECUTIVE ACTION

(Scotia-Barber)  
The assassination in Dallas retold in terms of a right-wing plot, with Lee Harvey Oswald roped in as unwitting scapegoat. Mark Lane's theories seemed more persuasive in *Rush to Judgment*, and the fact/fiction mixture looks a bit congealed. At the same, one for the collectors of conspiracy theories, and in terms of subject inescapably watchable. (Burt Lancaster, Robert Ryan; director, David Miller.)

## \*EXORCIST, THE (Columbia-Warner)

More nonsense talked about this film than anything since the flat-chested *Love Story*. After all the hullabaloo about it hitting audiences in their spiritual malaise, it turns out to be an old-fashioned horror movie: fine when it sticks to the horrors (some splendid demonic possession) but seized by paralysis of the pretensions when it gets serious. (Ellen Burstyn, Max von Sydow.) *Reviewed.*

## \*HAPPINESS (Other Cinema)

Rediscovered 1934 film by Alexander Medvedkin, an engaging satire about a simple-minded peasant's journey from exploitation to salvation on a collective farm. Quirky and inventive, though the mixture of surrealism and slapstick doesn't quite jell. (Piotr Zinoviev, Elena Egorova.)

## HIT! (CIC)

No more under-the-armpit shots, but obscurity is still the keynote of this Sidney Furie effort in the urban vigilante genre. Turgid stretches of improvised dialogue and inane comic relief do as little to hold attention as the scrappily handled action. (Billy Dee Williams, Gwen Welles.)

## INHERITOR, THE (EMI)

Irrepressibly vulgar thriller with political pretensions. About a playboy (Jean-Paul Belmondo) who inherits an industrial empire, discovers an international conspiracy to reinstate Fascism, and saves the world. Director Philippe Labro pays homage to American movies and Jean-Pierre Melville, but appears to have learned little. (Charles Denner, Carla Gravina.)

## \*LENNY BRUCE WITHOUT TEARS (Fair Enterprises)

A documentary compilation on the life and times of the American humorist, fascinating for the glimpses of his strange wit and personality, but too self-consciously 'hip' about the forces that drove him and the pressures that broke him. (Director, Fred Baker.)

## MAGNUM FORCE

(Columbia-Warner)  
Clint Eastwood is back as Siegel's hard-nosed cop, but is reduced to caricature by John Milius' screenplay (a ragbag of Western mythology and head-on tuggery) and Ted Post's crude direction. (Hal Holbrook, Mitchell Ryan.)

## \*MAHLER (VPS)

Mahler given the full Ken Russell treatment—bizarre dream sequences, death scenes galore—though less neurotic than might have been expected. Inventive in its fashion and superbly photographed; the music is heavily cut up, and the slangy dialogue should have been cut further. (Robert Powell, Georgina Hale.)

## McQ (Columbia-Warner)

John Wayne follows Clint Eastwood in the switch from western Westerns to the urban variety. A reasonably entertaining and devious plot is hampered by sluggish performances—from Wayne, composer Elmer Bernstein and director John Sturges. (Eddie Albert, Clu Gulager.)

## \*\*MEAN STREETS

(Columbia-Warner)  
New York's Little Italy and its unstable community of junior league Mafia hoodlums, feverishly documented by Corman graduate Martin Scorsese as a story of ambition held in check by the dependence of male friendship. Intense, at times incoherent, but compulsively watchable. (Harvey Keitel, Robert De Niro, Amy Robinson.)

## \*\*NADA (Connoisseur)

Change of pace for Chabrol with a brutally direct thriller (terrorist group kidnap American ambassador) which lets the very eloquent political message speak for itself. Particularly good on details of Establishment corruption. (Michel Duchaussoy, Maurice Garrel, Lou Castel.) *Reviewed.*

## \*OPTIMISTS OF NINE ELMS, THE (Scotia-Barber)

Anthony Simmons' first film since *Four in the Morning*. Just skirts the edge of sentimentality in its story of a busker, his dog, two children and a reluctant friendship, though the performances (Peter Sellers at his best for some time as the crotchety busker) and some finely observed social detail save it from going over the top. (Donna Mullane, John Chaffey.)

## \*OUTFIT, THE (CIC)

Much less convoluted and suspenseful than *Point Blank*, *The Outfit* has bifurcated Richard Stark's deadpan hero into two protagonists and otherwise padded and fudged his terse little tale. A nice profusion of Hollywood character actors makes up for the overall lack of drive. (Robert Duvall, Joe Don Baker, Richard Jaeckel; director, John Flynn.)

## PAPILLON (Columbia-Warner)

Sad emasculation of Charrière's lively if unconvincing novel (the convicts become nice all-American boys). An equally sad Waterloo for Franklin Schaffner, who can make nothing of it but a 2½-hour epic trampling the corn growing round the theme of man's inhumanity to man. Nice performance by Dustin Hoffman. (Steve McQueen.)

## \*\*PAYDAY (Fox-Rank)

*A Face in the Crowd* retold in *Easy Rider* terms, with Rip Torn as the country and western singer touring the hinterlands in the wake of his comeuppance. Leisurely, perceptive first film by Daryl Duke, full of quirkishly illuminating detours. (Elayne Heilveil, Cliff Emmich.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*SANTEE (Columbia-Warner)

Curiously attractive Western, something like a mixture of *Bad Company*, *Shane* and *Run for Cover*, with Glenn Ford as an obsessive bounty hunter who has to solve his own compulsion as well as that of the vengeful son of an outlaw he has killed. Beautifully written, and directed with a drive which carries it right over the sticky patches. (Michael Burns; director, Gary Nelson.)

## \*\*SERPICO (CIC)

Sidney Lumet escapes from his theatrical/allegorical straitjacket, and turns this semi-documentary account of the New York cop who waged a single-handed crusade against corruption into robust drama—complex, emotional, but lucidly controlled. (Al Pacino, John Randolph, Tony Roberts.)

## \*SEVEN-UPS, THE (Fox-Rank)

*The French Connection* continued, as a New York police special squad wage their own kind of war against racketeers. The ingredients—aggressive cops, spectacular car chase, slam-bang style—carry their own familiar charge after an indifferent opening; and morality has nothing

to do with it. (Roy Scheider, Victor Arnold; director, Philip D'Antoni.)

## SIDDHARTHA

(Columbia-Warner)  
Pictures to think Profound Thoughts by. Conrad Rooks films Hesse's early novel with a reverence approaching self-denial, not presuming to rethink a single detail for cinema. Sven Nykvist's exquisite postcard views of India abstract the zombie cast into lifeless compositions that match the disengaged direction exactly. (Shashi Kapoor.)

## STONE KILLER, THE

(Columbia-Warner)  
Film-making as painting by numbers: Dirty Lou versus the Godfather's private army of ex-GI mercenaries, making the odd car chase into cul-de-sacs of social commentary but mostly just killing as often as possible. In other words, Michael Winner's most formulaic film yet, with a feebly pretentious script that plays like random clips from a dozen others. (Charles Bronson, Martin Balsam.)

## \*SUMMER WISHES, WINTER DREAMS (Columbia-Warner)

Menopausal melodrama, respectably performed, which might have struck the right note of homely intimacy on television. On the big screen, it seems to be woefully lacking in both insight and irony. (Joanne Woodward, Martin Balsam; director, Gilbert Cates.)

## \*\*SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS (EMI)

Arthur Ransome's dinghy sailors reach the screen, playing pirates in the Lake District. A sensibly loyal adaptation of the children's classic, done in period (1929) by film-makers who like the book enough not to introduce misguided 'improvements' for the modern child. (Virginia McKenna, Ronald Fraser; director, Claude Whatham.)

## \*\*THREE MUSKETEERS, THE (Fox-Rank)

Lively and often very funny spoof version of Dumas, slightly marred by Richard Lester's tendency to push some of the jokes too hard. Marvellous colour and design, and enjoyably wholehearted playing right through the cast. (Michael York, Oliver Reed, Charlton Heston.)

## WALKING TALL (CIC)

The ultimate in hawk movies, propagandising the need for strong men to bring lawless America under control. All the more uncomfortable for being based on a real life story, attractively shot on location in Tennessee, and rather well directed by Phil Karlson. (Joe Don Baker, Elizabeth Hartman.)

## \*\*WESTWORLD (CIC)

Engaging first film, written (well) and directed (badly) by Michael Crichton, about a futuristic holiday resort which offers guests the chance to become gunslingers against lifelike robots staffing a pastiche Western town. Until the robots go berserk, that is. Great fun despite its faults, with Yul Brynner excellent as the deadliest robot in the West. (Richard Benjamin.)

## \*\*ZARDOZ (Fox-Rank)

Perhaps a shade too whimsical in its blend of sociological prophecy and sci-fi fantasy—one keeps expecting Tolkien Hobbits and garden gnomes to come prancing hand-in-hand—but extremely striking visually. A voluptuous slice of magician's sleight-of-hand, made with a sly sense of fun which makes it difficult to be sure how seriously John Boorman means his message to be read. (Sean Connery, Charlotte Rampling.) *Reviewed.*



# News from The Other Cinema

## NEW FEATURE FILMS include

### AFRICA

EMITAI (Sembene)  
THE MONEY ORDER (Sembene)  
THE LION HAS 7 HEADS (Rocha)

### BOLIVIA

BLOOD OF THE CONDOR (Sanjines)  
COURAGE OF THE PEOPLE (Sanjines)

### BRAZIL

TROPICI (Amico)

### CHILE

THE JACKAL OF NAHUELTORO (Littin)  
THE PROMISED LAND (Littin)  
WHEN THE PEOPLE AWAKE

### CUBA

I AM A SON OF AMERICA (Alvarez)

### FRANCE

BLUES UNDER THE SKIN (Manthoulis)  
COUP POUR COUP (Karmitz)  
THEMROC (Faraldo)  
TOUT VA BIEN (Godard/Gorin)

### GERMANY

SIGNS OF LIFE (Herzog)

### GREAT BRITAIN

ADULT FUN (Scott)

### ITALY

BLACK HOLIDAY (Leto)

### JAPAN

KASHIMA PARADISE (Le Masson/  
Deswarte)  
A PAGE OF MADNESS (Kinugasa)

### USA

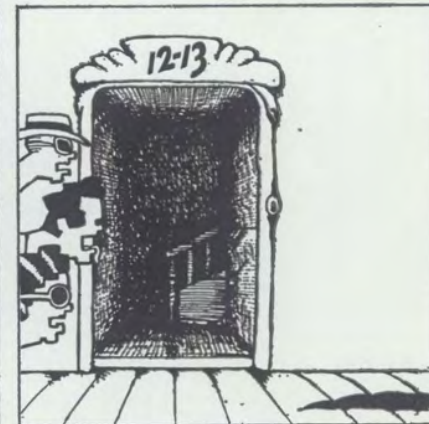
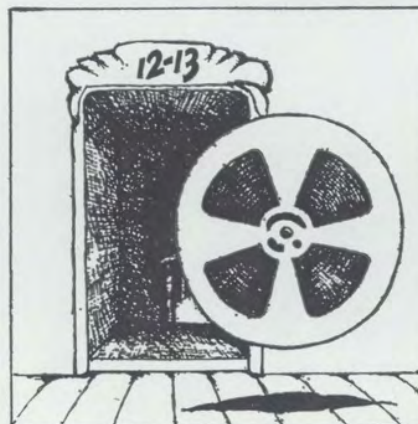
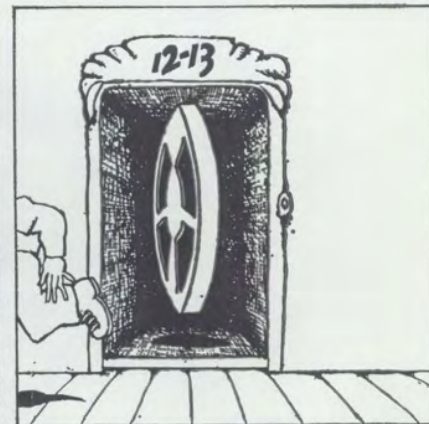
R.D. Laing's ASYLUM (Robinson)  
ATTICA (Firestone)  
HERE COMES EVERYBODY (Whitmore)  
POINT OF ORDER (de Antonio/Talbot)

### USSR

HAPPINESS (Medvedkin)

## EXHIBITION

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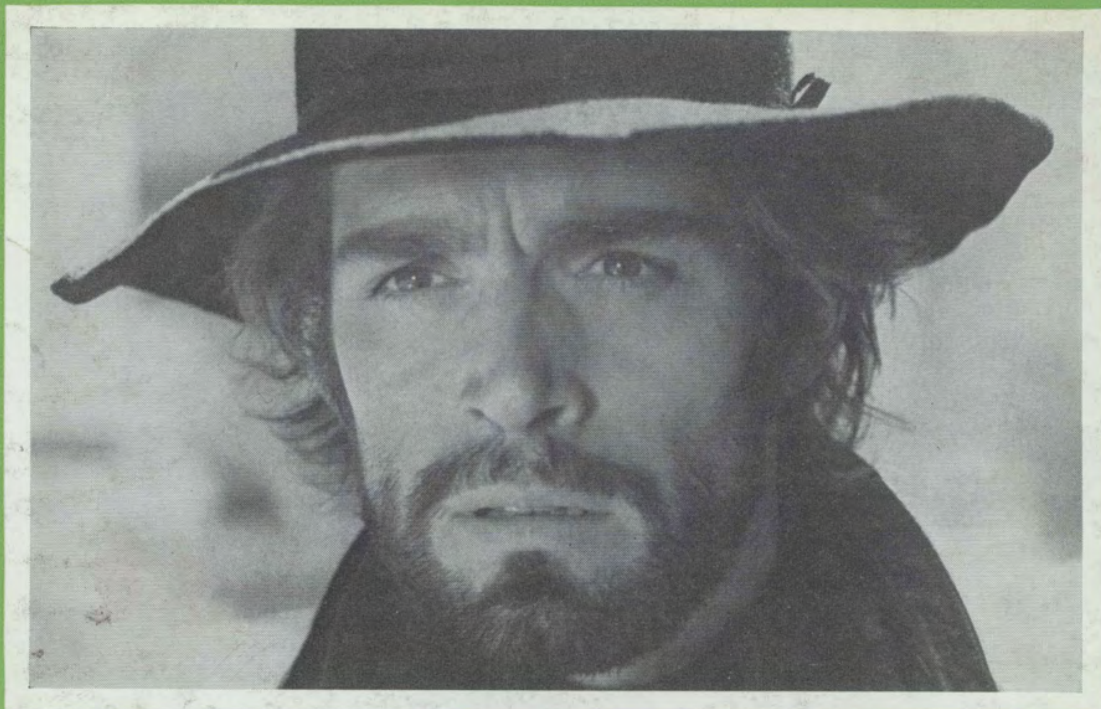
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